

RELIGIOUS LIFE

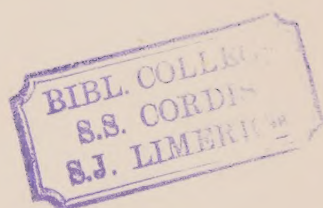
VOCATION

BLACKFRIARS

Religious Life

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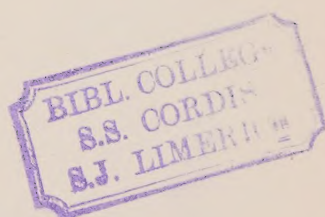
VOCATION is a translation of *Le Discernement des Vocations de Religieuses* and is the second volume in the "Religious Life" series which is the result of a number of Conferences in Paris convened for the assistance of religious. VOCATION begins with the historical background, considering how the early church regarded the call to perfection, and the commonsense and deeply theological treatment of the obligation to follow one's vocation and the way in which a true religious vocation is to be discerned is of the greatest practical value. Many fallacies and pitfalls will be avoided if those who think they have a 'vocation' read these essays. Also included in this volume are articles of a psychological and canonical character, of practical assistance to priests and superiors who have to decide whether a would-be postulant should be accepted.





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VOCATION



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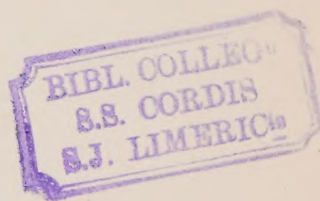
RELIGIOUS LIFE

II

VOCATION

Being the English Version of
Le Discernement des Vocations de Religieuses

Translated by Walter Mitchell



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FOREWORD

Continuing the efforts which gave rise to the *Directoire des Supérieures* and *Adaptations de la Vie Religieuse* (which have appeared in English as one volume called *Religious Sisters*), thirty or so French religious and secular priests met together in July 1949, to study the problems arising to-day out of the question of vocation.

The substance of the papers read at these meetings were subsequently published as *Le Discernement des Vocations de Religieuses* (Editions du Cerf, Paris), though two of the more specialised and technical psychological essays were published in *Supplement de la Vie Spirituelle* No. 14, 15 August, 1950 (Cerf, Paris). In this English version one of these latter essays is included, and also a short paper by Dr C. Busnelli has been appended as it bears out the contention of Père Plé in the preceding chapter. This short paper was read as a communication to the Congress held in Rome in the last few weeks of 1950 to discuss the question of Religious Life to-day. These two additions add to the completeness of the volume. It is with regret that we have omitted the only other paper read at this meeting in the French pages of the *Supplement* just mentioned ; but it was addressed specifically to the clergy and to experts. This was the long essay by Dr Ch. H. Nodet on 'the nervous attraction to religion'. We hope that in publishing these essays in English we shall be doing a service to priests, superiors, novice-masters and novice-mistresses as well as those who seriously consider the matter of their own vocation.

NIHIL OBSTAT: quominus liber cui titulus " VOCATION "
imprimi possit.

J. Rea, D.D., Ph.D.

IMPRIMATUR: ✠ Joseph,
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CHAPTER I

THE CALL TO PERFECTION IN
PATRISTIC TRADITION

By DOM O. ROUSSEAU

All forms of religious life, the most austere kinds of eastern monasticism as well as the most active modern congregations, are related in a way that might be called evangelical : they all look to the words of Christ for the justification of their existence. But besides this, they are all, as well, developments of a primitive historical model. They have deliberately set out either to keep as many as possible of the characteristics of this model or to depart from the majority of them in order to emphasize some special practice or virtue. Whether they have kept close to this type, or rather archetype, or whether they have departed from it, they have always taken it as the standard when assessing the degree of their own development. Their aim has been either to identify themselves with the archetype absolutely, or to adopt certain differences, but whether *accedendo* or *recedendo* their evolution began here. Looked at horizontally, they are so many realisations of the gospel ideal which since the thirteenth century has been called in the west the perfection of the counsels. Seen vertically, they are developments of a single historical principle from which they have issued genealogically, so to speak, into various branches.

This principle will be found at work in the history of a man providentially raised up by God in the third century to be the father of all monks and nuns and religious. One of the greatest of doctors, St Athanasius, was prompted to write the life of this man, the great St Anthony of the desert. St Athanasius's account of the vocation of St Anthony is a perfect synthesis of the evangelical counsels and will serve as our guide throughout this study. No better basis could be found in scripture or the fathers.

St Athanasius wrote the life of St Anthony at the request of some monks of the desert who sought inspiration from his example. Even to-day we are all of us more or less deliberately imitating this magnificent vocation. All religious, each in his own

way and perhaps without knowing it, have their eyes fixed on him when they want to preserve their ideal and be faithful to it.

This is the account of Anthony's vocation—

After the death of his parents he was left alone with one sister still very small. He was about eighteen or twenty, and it was he who looked after his sister and the house. Now, not six months after the death of his parents, while he was going to church as usual and collecting his thoughts on the way, he began to consider how the apostles had left everything and followed the Saviour, how those who in the Acts sold their goods brought the price and laid it at the feet of the apostles to be given to them that were in need, and how great a hope was laid up for them in heaven. With his mind full of all this he went into the church. It happened that the gospel was being read at the time and he heard the Lord saying to the rich man, 'If you want to be perfect, go and sell all that you have and give to the poor, and come and follow me, and you shall have treasure in heaven'.¹ It seemed to Anthony that his remembering the saints had been inspired by God and that the reading had been made specially for him. He at once left the church; the possessions which he had from his parents (three hundred fields, fertile and very pleasant) he gave away to his neighbours, for fear they should cause him or his sister the slightest annoyance.²

And the narrative then shows us Anthony, after he had stripped himself of his possessions, withdrawing deeper and deeper into the desert to follow Christ.

Notice at the outset—and this answers the important question as to whether there is any difference between the call to perfection given to all the baptised alike and that of the religious vocation—that Anthony was never attracted by anything but the gospel pure and simple. He was just a Christian, was just like all the other people of his time who had received baptism, and he had not the slightest pretension—for he had no pretensions at all—to distinguish himself from the common herd by choosing a 'special vocation'. All he wanted to do was to be faithful to the practice of Christ's teaching. The call to evangelical perfection is

¹ cf. Matt. 19, 21.

² *Vita S. Antonii*, proem. 2, P.G. 26. col. 841B.

a counsel given to everybody, and the religious life as such is only the Christian life carried as far as possible to its logical end, as we shall see. Between the religious vocation and that of the ordinary Christian there is only a difference of degree : if you want a better quality of Christian practice you may choose the counsels, but you will have to make a bigger sacrifice and renounce many legitimate satisfactions, just as when you want to buy a better quality of goods you have to pay a higher price. Prudence will suggest this step to the Christian, for he knows that he will recover his outlay in another way.

In the early Church the question of a possible difference between the two states of life never arose. Perhaps it occurs to-day because we now point out with greater emphasis that perfection can accompany any state of life—there can be perfection in the state of marriage by virtue of the grace of the sacraments, perfection in the complete giving of self in the service of one's neighbour through works of charity, through the missions, etc.—and because we try to make comparisons. That cases may exist in which people living in the world may be asked for renunciation as great as those in the religious state, or greater, is beyond all question. But that is not the point. Here our concern is to see how the Church and tradition have understood the response to Christ's counsels to all who want to follow him more perfectly. And the classical way in which the Church has regarded this response can be seen precisely in the conduct of those who have taken the same step as St Anthony. We can see it in the lives of those who have left everything and in some way withdrawn into solitude in order to seek God alone, while ready to return to the midst of their brethren to make God better known—to give God to their brethren when they have really found him themselves. To get a better idea of all this, let us go back for a few moments to the scene described by St Athanasius.

The attraction which God exercised in Anthony's mind showed itself suddenly at four points :—

1. The words of Christ calling those who would be perfect to follow him. 'If thou wilt, go, sell what thou hast, and come, follow me' ;

2. The fervour of the primitive Christian community, which had been generous enough to carry out to the letter this sovereign

advice to sell their goods and give to the poor the price received ;

3. The vocation of the apostles, who had left everything in order to follow Christ ;

4. Finally the eschatological fulness of this gesture of complete renunciation : the reward, treasure in heaven, the great hope of the believer.

Anthony suddenly saw himself at the centre of this fourfold influence. Grace gave him light like a flash of lightning. Three of these fields of influence he felt at work upon him while he was still on the road : the early Christians giving their goods away, the vocation of the apostles, the reward they would derive from it. The first, the most important of them all, came to him while the gospel was being read. It formed a synthesis of the other three. Caught up on every side into this irresistible current, Anthony applied the gospel words to his own case. The decision was taken. Following Christ was henceforth to be his business. He no longer hesitated ; he sold everything, distributed the price of it and went away.

It would be an admirable thing to take Athanasius's account word for word and attempt an exegesis of his expressions. It would be worth going into thoroughly some day. The scriptural terms springing up as he writes do not simply reveal a profound and living knowledge of the Bible, they bring out a whole aspect of theology as well. You can find in them all the mystery of monasticism, not, of course, in the subtle form that was later to be given to it by the Greek theologians following in the wake of the Pseudo-Dionysius, but in its earliest, essential outlines. Let us keep in mind the four aspects of it that we have just mentioned and make some effort to see what they imply.

I. SELF-RENUNCIATION AND THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST

When looking for a starting point from which to approach monastic perfection we must first of all take account of martyrdom. A great deal has been written of late on martyrdom and on its relationship to monasticism, a state of life which is in a secondary sense analogous to it. The early fathers, those who lived at the time of the persecutions, all speak of the greatness of martyrdom and consider it as Christ's gift to his chosen disciples—the opportunity of leaving this world which is not his (his

kingdom is not of this world) and of following him through torment and through death to his kingdom. 'When the Roman Empire threw the Christians to the lions,' it has been said, 'it was only doing what Pilate had done when he handed over Jesus to the mob. It is because they belong to another state that Christians are persecuted by the state.'¹ The abandonment of the earthly city by the martyr is the full flowering of the baptism of water in the baptism of blood. Doubtless this grace can be received by any of the faithful, and it is good to prepare for it; but from the fathers we gather the impression that some Christians, in their eagerness to give themselves without reserve, burned with an intense desire to give their lives for Christ, that they put this desire before everything else and made it, so to speak, the aim of their lives. The Acts of the Martyrs, which were universally circulated for the edification of Christians, were *par excellence* the literary genre furnishing examples for imitation. They were the only hagiographical narratives then known. When the period of the persecutions was over, those who were determined to seek Christ outside this world which is not his, felt the urge, in their desire for perfection, to go out towards those desert regions where he himself had gone to fight against Satan, those mysterious parts, so near, it was thought, to the lost paradise. This nostalgic longing for the kingdom certainly had a great deal to do with the vocation of the early solitaries, as a good number of historians now admit.

Thus, from this time, we see hagiography taking up the lives of these heroes of the desert. St Athanasius's Life of St Anthony is the 'earliest hagiographical study of a person who had reached sanctity without tasting martyrdom'.² The baptism of blood was succeeded by the baptism of asceticism, and on these grounds monastic perfection was henceforth traditionally considered as a second baptism, just as martyrdom had been. But whereas martyrdom might become a matter of obligation for any Christian in this case there was no question of anything but free choice. Nevertheless, as we shall show further on, the obligation of 'bearing witness' would exist for the ascetic as well, inasmuch as

¹ A. Lamy, *Bios Angelikos*, in *Dieu Vivant*, vii. 64-5.

² Dom. H. Leclercq, article, *Monachisme*, in the *Dictionnaire d'archeologie chretienne et de liturgie*, XI. col. 1802.

when he had reached perfection he would have to 'bear witness' to the heavenly city in the earthly one. The perfection of the Christian living in the world is also perfected in martyrdom, and anyone may be called to that. But the monastic vocation rests essentially on freedom.

And indeed, it was with entire freedom that Anthony made his great decision. He had been living a pious life and had no need of conversion, at any rate in the sense we commonly give to the word. The only thing that distinguishes the vocation of the religious or monk from that of people in the world is the fact that the religious has freely chosen to give himself. The religious vocation belongs to a more advanced stage of human liberty. The religious gives himself freely and entirely, once and for all, in absolutely perfect freedom, which goes as far as it is possible to go in giving. It is substantially the same as when an officer in the war looks for someone to blow up a bridge—a dangerous business and likely to be fatal. The officer does not want to order anyone to do it; he asks for a volunteer. Some of the men hesitate. One thinks of his wife, another of his parents or children, another is frankly afraid, yet another just will not face up to it. In the end there comes one who gives everything, who realises that this sacrifice is greater than all the rest. He stands up and says, 'I'll go, sir'. This is an act of supreme freedom because it springs from the greatest detachment. I remember a saying of William James's, which it will not be out of place to quote here: 'If we cling to life, while another discards it as one might throw away a flower, we feel that he has an unquestionable superiority over us'. He is more of a man in the last resort because he is freer. The officer's appeal was made to all the men; it excluded none but it laid no obligation on any. So it is with Christ's words *Si vis perfectus esse, vende quod habes*. What in the case of the military operation can be called generosity or nobility is here called the grace of vocation. Christ appeals to us all; he excludes none, but neither does he lay an obligation on any of us.

There is one point we must notice as a thing of the highest importance and worth more than all theories, old or new, about the origin of monasticism; namely that Anthony's guiding principle was the giving of himself *in a spirit of faith*. Christ had said 'If thou wilt be perfect'. Because he had said that, and

precisely *on that account*, Anthony willingly chose the consequences. Just as for Christ's sake men had gone forth to martyrdom, so faith in his words was to hold the monk towards God all his life long (we are in the world of the theological virtues here, not in the sphere of the moral ones), as it had been at the root of his generous response in the first place. Now it is this same faith in these words which has led the solitaries in their thousands, the monks in their tens of thousands and indeed the whole body of religious, to live the monastic or the religious life ; and, in the West at any rate, the same can be said of the vocation to the priesthood. All these priests have heard Christ's voice, not a reedy sound, but like that of many waters ; and they have answered because it was *he* who was calling. It is important to form some idea of the magnitude of these words which will never pass away, which are spirit and life, which still sound as young and fresh as in those early days. Until the end of time there will always be some who hear them and joyously reply in that same spirit of 'Godwardness'. But, as we know, only those are truly called who, like Anthony, really understood the meaning of the words in all their magnitude, and like him apply it to themselves, declaring : 'This is for me. I choose this. I will follow Christ in order to be perfect, because he, who is truth and light, invites me, tells me that if I wish to be perfect I must do this.'

Thus the determining factor in the choice of a religious vocation cannot be some merely human calculation, nor can a natural tendency towards generosity take the place of the real response. The only valid motives for this self-giving are those essentially Christian things, the acts of faith and love. Anyone putting other motives in place of these might perhaps put up with religious life for a few years, but he could not remain a religious for life. It would not be worth his while to make a start : *qui coepit aedificare et non potuit consummare* . . . We all know cases where the religious had never seen this essential point in its proper light and something finally gave way. Can he be called defeatist, shirker, malcontent ? Perhaps he had never understood, or if he had, he had lost sight of the foundation of faith on which his act ought to have rested.

II. THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Anthony went out into the heart of the desert. There he was subjected to violent attacks by the enemy who lay there in hiding and objected to being disturbed : as everyone knows, St Anthony was the great opponent of the evil spirits. Disciples came to him. He taught them the way of renunciation that he had practised himself : *qui vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum* (Mt. 16, 24). And from that time the desert was peopled with spiritual athletes, competing with great zest to see who could best chastise his body in order to achieve the most perfect self-renunciation. The most rigorous fasts, watchings and penances appeared in diverse forms, ascetic feats of strength, from which, alas, pride was not always absent. Little by little, as if by natural selection, renunciation of one's own will—which in the last resort is the nearest approach to martyrdom—came to be recognised as the essential, without which the rest is nothing and which is enough of itself, since it takes the place of everything else. So in order to achieve their self-renunciation better, the solitaries tried to abandon their own will or, more exactly, to accept the will of another, for habitually to go contrary to one's own will exposes a man, sooner or later, to the danger of illusion. They needed masters to make their decisions for them. This period in the desert was the age of obedience, a virtue which came to be regarded as the chief safeguard of humility, seen as the principle of all perfection. Monastic founders made it the basis of their rules. Soon, too, this ascetic obedience was linked with Christ's and it became the obedience of love. It was compared to Christ's fulfilment of his Father's will and identified with it : 'becoming obedient unto death'.

Yet, at the beginning, the desert fathers would not hear of a rule ; they feared lest the servile spirit of the Old Law might appear once again and destroy the great liberty of the Gospel. When a certain brother felt the need of making rules for his followers, his spiritual father said to him one day : 'Give them an example, not a law'. Those were wise words. In the monastic life the real legislators have all begun by being themselves a living rule.

When it became desirable to write down the maxims of the fathers and codify their counsels, the compilers kept strictly to

the words of Scripture, for they felt that no human word could be added to the word of God. St Basil's *Moralia*, for example, which form the basis of his rule properly so-called, are simply sentences from Scripture, generally from the gospel, grouped under different headings. With the exceptions of these headings, not a word is by the saint himself. Since then the wheel has turned and to-day, strangely enough, we have to keep out of religious constitutions 'all texts from holy scripture, the councils and the fathers'.¹ Doubtless, what is envisaged by that is the romantic sort of quotation with which trite regulations were at one time so often seasoned, not always too happily, we must admit. But what are we to think of the remark of the canonist who, in his desire to justify the Roman ruling, says: 'These quotations add nothing of any value to the constitutions, which receive their force from the approval of the Holy See'?² That is a queer way of estimating the value of the sources of our faith.

What about the vows? There were, similarly, no vows at the beginning of monasticism. The effect of their introduction was to limit the monastic promise to the highest common measure. Now the first principle had been to avoid any sort of limitation that would prevent an approach to God as near and as freely made as possible. All these human improvements were to come only at a later stage, by the force of circumstances, to guard against abuses and help the majority to preserve the perfection of their lives: *ut fortes cupiant et debiles non refugiant*, as St Benedict says.³

Life in common took the solitaries back to the model provided by the early Christian community. If the ideal of renunciation received its essential outlines in the anchoritic life, where it was shaped and brought out in all its force, it was not long before other elements also inherent in the Christian life were added to it. We know, for instance, of St Basil's marked preference for a fully-developed form of cenobitic life, where the brethren could have the great stimulus of vying with one another in charity in their various activities. Again, renunciation of personal ownership of material goods found its most effective safeguard in the

¹ *Normae* of 6 March, 1921. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XII, 312.

² Dom P. Bastien, *Directoire canonique*, 1933, p. 53.

³ *Regula*, c. 64.

cenobitic life. Of course the solitary had left all his possessions and given away their price, and when he went into the desert, he went bereft of all earthly goods. But, little by little, whether he liked it or not, he had to take possession of certain necessary objects so long as he lived alone. He had to cultivate his garden, he needed his cell, his field, his household utensils, his tools. Imperceptibly the danger of personal ownership could become an obstacle once more, and it was not the least one. Here, again, the example of the early Christian community was useful: 'at the feet of the apostles'.¹ Origen had had some idea of this even before the rise of monasticism. 'It seems to me,' he says, 'that it would be a work for the noble-minded and those who have all the qualities that mark a bishop, to urge those who can and who are open to persuasion, to draw their supplies from a common fund and to try and get others to do the same. It would be a picture of the harmony in which the faithful lived at the time of the apostles.'²

Thus, as soon as monasticism came into being, each monk was provided with effective means for self-stripping in that he gave to the community everything he received, when otherwise he might have kept it. So it was that this form of complete renunciation of ownership, which towards the end of the middle ages came to be known among us as 'poverty', very soon took its place with humility, obedience and charity, as one of the classical virtues of the monk. Of chastity, which in patristic theology is above all an eschatological virtue, we shall speak in a moment.

III. THE APOSTOLIC LIFE

According to patristic tradition, those who by the labour of asceticism have reached a high degree of virtue return to the people to draw them towards God. 'The perfect become the equals of the apostles. They have the mind of apostles; like St John they can turn to men and tell them what they have seen in God. They can—and they ought; indeed they cannot do otherwise.'³ So runs a summary of the teaching on the apostolate

¹ Acts 4, 35. *ad pedes apostolorum*.

² *Comm. in Matth.*, P.G. 13. col. 1297D.

³ Simeon, the New Theologian, quoted by I. Hausherr, in *Orientalia Christiana* XII (1928), p. xxx.

given by Simeon the New Theologian, one of the Byzantine mystics representing the tradition of the East. When Christ wanted his disciples to follow him, he sent them out : *Misit eos*.

This is one of the most striking points of divergence between the theology of the East and that of the West. When in the West we speak of the apostolic life, we mean above all the active life, the priest's ministry, either that which is usually carried out in a parochial setting by the hierarchy or their preachers (the *homo apostolicus* of St Alphonsus), or else the work in the missions in distant countries. Here, then, it is a question of the work of the priest at his most active, either directly, or in helping with teaching, charitable institutions, etc.

For the East, however, the 'apostolic man' is one who has received charismata and reached the highest degree of contemplation ; he lives in union with Christ to such an extent that he realises in his own person Christ's sovereign promises to his apostles—that they should work miracles, cure the sick, read the secrets of the heart, prophesy and cast out evil spirits. From this point of view St Anthony was the most apostolic of all the solitaries, although he was neither deacon nor priest and did not belong to the hierarchy at all. The number of those who came to him in the desert to obtain advice or spiritual favours was very great. Having reached this state, the saint could no longer hide his light under a bushel ; he had to let God set him up for the people to see. His soul had become 'apostolic'. The biographer of Simeon of Thessalonica says of his hero : 'His thoughts were like the apostles', because he was inspired and moved by the spirit of God ; for which reason the grace of the word was spread on his lips (Ps. 44, 3) as much as on the lips of the apostles. 'Ignorant like them, he spoke of God and taught the faithful in inspired writings.'¹

Many more texts could be quoted. Even modern Russian writers have immortalised the 'charismatic apostolate'. One need only think of Dostoevsky's character Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*, or in less romantic vein the figure of the starets Serafim of Sarov.

Perhaps we have here the radical solution to all the disputes in the West about the two kinds of religious life, active and

¹ Hausherr, *op. cit.* p. 97.

contemplative, and a key to the thomist solution of the mixed life. But charismatics are rare, because in fact real sanctity is rare. And when grace does not shine through a person who is in some sort 'sacramentalised' by it, we must make all the more use of the directly sacramental means that God has given us. But that does not mean that we should forget either the promises made to those disciples who should be faithful or the part they have to play in the Church. It is always Pentecost for the Church, and the Church is essentially charismatic.

Because he has made the heavenly city the term of all his desires and has seen it reflected in so many ways in the mirror of the scriptures, the monk's part is to bear witness to it here on earth. 'The function of monasticism in the Church,' it has been said, 'seems to be to affirm that the Christian belongs to the heavenly city, to affirm his rights in it by exercising them'.¹ And that is indeed what people expect from those who are consecrated to God. They expect the sort of charity that is found in heaven, speech about heaven, the food of heaven and the gift of heavenly things. I remember an old priest once saying: 'In the ranks of the priesthood there are many who shine by their energy, intelligence, organizing-talent or eloquence, but very few who really shine by their holiness. Yet it is precisely this that ought to be characteristic of the priest, since he is consecrated to God'. That, in very simple terms, is what we meant by charismatics and their rarity in the Church.

Much could be said here about active congregations properly so-called. St Thomas explains that there are two kinds of active life: one flows from contemplation and communicates as it were its surplus to other people²; this is the one we have just been talking about; the other, which is not so perfect, is essentially occupied *circa exteriores actiones*; that is, about external activities. Now this is the case, in practice at any rate, with nearly all the orders and congregations which in the West are called 'active'. It must be acknowledged, too, that the same holds good for a fair number of those in our present religious society having a right to the epithet 'contemplative'. Activity is so widespread in Catholicism that it springs up everywhere, even, sometimes, in

¹ A. Lamy, *l.c.*, p. 76.

² *Summ. Theol.* IIa-IIae, q. 188, a.6.

houses which ought to be the farthest removed from the world. Now, the fact that a community comes to undertake some sort of activity modifies the order previously existing for it among the essential religious virtues, which will now show themselves in a new kind of behaviour on the part of the community.

If an institution is founded for a particular activity, it will not be the monastic life pure and simple. Certain elements of the monastic life will be sacrificed, or there will be a tendency to underestimate them. Hence, while rejoicing in these new means of sanctification in her midst, the Church nevertheless rejects the names 'monk' and '*ordo monasticus*' for those who use them. They may be canons, mendicants, clerks regular, missionaries or something else, but they are not monks.

One might perhaps be tempted to see in these institutions an echo of those early communities of ascetics or clerks, grouped round a church or bishop and sometimes called episcopal or urban monasticism—the order of deaconesses, too, can be reduced to this kind of religious life. But all that has been completely levelled out by Western monasticism, the rule of which has been imposed everywhere. Indeed, monasticism has left its mark essentially even in institutes very far from it in spirit; the year's noviciate, the enclosure, the charter of profession, the vows and silence, all these have been admitted into the canon law.

A religious who had lived a long time in Russia and been in close touch with the monks there, once expressed the astonishment he felt on returning to his own country at hearing his colleagues discussing politics and other things with secular interest. 'Monks are not like that in the East,' he said. 'They would look at all these events from a more spiritual point of view; more eschatologically, perhaps more apocalyptically. They give the impression of belonging rather to another world.'

IV. TREASURE IN HEAVEN

We must begin this section by quoting one or two texts. And first, our Lord's famous answer to Peter, as recorded by St Matthew (19, 28-9): 'Amen I say to you, that you, who have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the seat of his majesty, you also shall sit on twelve seats judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' And then the complement of

it : 'And everyone that hath left house, or brethren or sisters, or father or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting'. Then the great promise to the virgins in the Apocalypse : 'These are they who were not defiled with women : for they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth' (Apoc. 14, 4). The power of judging given to the apostles is mysterious enough by itself and the ascetic conditions attached to it make it all the more so. The promise to the virgins is in a sense not quite so mysterious. St Augustine gives an elaborate explanation of it in his treatise *De Sancta Virginitate*, with reference to the virgins' hymn. This is one 'that the virgins alone can sing. You it is,' he says, 'who will bring to the marriage of the Lamb a new canticle, which you will sing to the sound of your harps, not as the whole earth sings for it has received the command, *Sing ye to the Lord a new canticle; sing to the Lord, all the earth* (Ps. 95, 1), but such as none save you can say (Apoc. 14, 3). Thus were you seen in the Apocalypse by him who was dearer to the Lamb than any other, by him who used to rest on the bosom of the Lamb . . . and he wrote, too, of you that you would follow the Lamb wherever he went. Where does he go ? What is the place where none dare follow him and no-one can, save you ? Where is it the Lamb goes ? . . . The joy of Christ's virgins is all to do with Christ ; it is in Christ, with Christ, goes after Christ, comes through Christ and exists for Christ . . . Go after these joys, follow the Lamb, for the flesh of the Lamb is virgin indeed. The purity which his conception and birth did not impair in his mother, he has always kept himself. It is right that wherever he goes you should follow him, in virginity of heart and flesh.'¹

The great reward is marriage, marriage with the Lamb, earthly marriage being only a faint shadow of this. This idea is expressed with amazing force in the great preface for the consecration of virgins, in the Roman Pontifical : 'O God, lover of souls, in your Word through whom all things were made, you restore our human substance, which was vitiated in our first parents by the Devil's trickery. So do you bring it back to its original innocence and even give it experience of those eternal goods which shall be its possession in the next world ; and men still bound by their

¹ *De Sancta Virginitate*, 27 ; PL. 40, col. 406.

mortal state you already advance to likeness with the angels' ('they neither marry nor are they given in marriage'—we might digress here to show the necessary connection between virginity and celibacy on the one hand, and the angelic life on the other: the life of praise, the psalter, the divine office and celibacy.) *Hoc donum in quasdam mentes de largitatis tuae fonte defluxit ut existerent . . . sublimiores animae quae in viri ac mulieris copula fastidirent connubium, concupiscerent sacramentum, nec imitarentur quod nuptiis agitur, sed diligerent quod nuptiis prae-notatur.* 'Some men have received this gift in their hearts from the spring of your generosity, that there should be . . . superior souls, who in the joining of man and woman should disdain marriage itself and desire only what marriage is a sign of, and instead of imitating what is done in marrying should love what marrying signifies.' That is real marriage, and it is the reason for the chastity of monks and the celibacy of those clerks who are vowed to celibacy. We are at a purely eschatological level here, and it is most important that we should have our eyes constantly fixed in faith on our treasure in heaven, in order to sustain the attacks meted out to us by our life on earth.

But are all these great truths really alive in us? Are they alive in the souls entrusted to our care? For my part I am convinced that in all these questions of renunciation, apostolic life, common life and chastity we have in great measure lost sight of the complementary truths, or rather, the essential and indispensable truths given us by the faith to sustain vocations at their true pitch. That is why there is a crisis in our religious congregations. Does not all this amount to saying, as a current expression has it, that this crisis is due to a 'lack of the supernatural spirit'? No, it is not that; it is more than that. When we speak of the supernatural spirit we are formulating an abstract truth, borrowed from a theology more or less separated from the great unifying riches of revelation. And this supernatural spirit exists in many congregations. What is missing is a concrete vision of the faith, of the 'substance of things to be hoped for' (Heb. 11, 1). Lack of contact with the proper food for Christian minds, and especially the holy scriptures, has diminished the religious values essential to our vocations. An unfortunate legalism has made everything shrink.

The renunciation spoken of in the gospel has degenerated into a childish attachment on the part of some communities to outworn forms, an attachment that has nothing in it of the great liberty of Anthony's renunciation of the world. The desert has become the enclosure with its pharisaical scruples, the vow a thing for casuists and their acrobatics. Obedience has degenerated into observance of a set of trifling details, respect for which is the main thing inculcated in the training of postulants; before this the greatness of the gift made in religion rapidly crumbles away. The royal virtue of chastity and virginity has become a code of modesty, a reinforcement of the moralists' treatise *de sexto*, which is immeasurably far from the fundamental eschatology of it. As for the life of the early Christian community, what, alas, has become of that in an environment in which souls get out of joint and narrow instead of being broadened by the great liberty of love? The slightest offence becomes an everlasting grudge on which the soul feeds day after day, until at last it is incurably poisoned.

One might be inclined to take this lessening of supernatural or even natural values as the reason for the decline of many congregations of women to-day. But does the blame lie chiefly with the congregations themselves? 'Do we give enough care,' a theologian recently asked, 'to that part of Christ's flock for which we ought to keep the best we have?'¹ What is really responsible for the spiritual mediocrity of which we complain? The real reason for the decay of so many communities is, surely, simply this: that our theology has come adrift from its sources. Priests and theologians have allowed Christian doctrine to be impoverished in favour of a lean diet of superficial devotion. They have allowed legalism to invade every domain of religious thought, they have let the mystery evaporate. All that is left to feed these women's spirits, separated as they are from everything else, is little devotional practices and often insipid constitutions which, for want of being broadened by the great visions found in the scriptures, have become a happy hunting ground for the nervous fads of narrowing minds. In an age in which an effort is being made to return to the purest values in dogma, one in which

¹ J. Daniélou, *La vie monastique et ses problèmes actuels*, in *Dieu vivant* VII, p. 60.

the girls who join religious communities are themselves aspiring to live in the great mysteries of Christianity, they cannot but feel stifled in these novitiates with all their petty rules, where the chief preoccupation is to train the postulants in the routine formalism of another age, and where the girl who yesterday did not even wear stockings must to-day wear long boots and three skirts, and revere all this wardrobe and its accessories as the signs *par excellence* of the gift she has made of herself to Christ.

We feel ourselves that our theology has become impoverished, and it is evident what efforts are being made to-day to put new life into it. But it will take time for this movement to do its work. Meanwhile, we have grown insipid. Let us not forget that, as the Church gives us to understand in the liturgy of the doctors, we are by our teaching the 'salt of the earth'. *Quod si sal evanuerit, in quo salietur ?*

CHAPTER II

THE OBLIGATION TO FOLLOW A VOCATION

By A. MOTTE, O.P.

I. THE PROBLEM

The dispute about the obligation of following a vocation seems to be of recent origin.

Christians have always realised that there is something unfitting in the rejection of a call from God to a way of perfection. In theory the question may have been somewhat complicated by the distinction, legitimate enough, between precept and counsel ; but it remains true that in practice refusal of vocation has always been morally suspect and is generally declared dangerous and imprudent even by those moralists who stress the optional character of the counsels.

The origin of this feeling is doubtless to be found in the gospel. The celebrated case of the rich young man is undoubtedly central in the dispute (Matt. 19, 16-26 ; Mark 10, 17-27 ; Luke 18, 18-25). There we clearly see certain things emerging as requisite for perfection, over and above the commandments. In order to obtain eternal life, which is what the young man wants, he must keep the commandments. 'All these have I kept from my youth,' he replies, 'What is yet wanting to me ?'—'If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven. And come follow me.' (Matthew). Mark and Luke have not the phrase, 'If thou wilt be perfect', but Mark says, 'One thing is wanting unto thee'. The sense is the same ; in both cases there is the transition from something commanded to something freely added. Those who consent to follow Christ in the business of self-stripping have all they need to take them to eternal life. 'And when the young man had heard this word,' St Matthew continues, 'he went away sad : for he had great possessions.' Compared with his first question and the good desires which evidently had produced it, this is a step backwards. The accompanying sadness, pointed out by all three evangelists, certainly gives the impression of a conscience not at

rest. This interpretation is confirmed by what follows: 'Jesus, looking round about, saith to his disciples: How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God' (Mark). In saying which, is he not casting doubt even on the young man's salvation, as if a refusal like that left little ground for hope?

The cases of vocation recorded by St Luke (9, 57-62), and St Matthew (8, 19-22) show the urgent character of vocation. There is no time to bury a father or say goodbye to the people at home. The reason surely is that the affair is an important one and the call requires to be taken seriously.

The parable of the discourteous guests (Luke 14, 15-24; Matt. 22, 1-10) is not told specifically in view of the call of vocation, but its conclusion, 'I say unto you that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper,' hangs like a threat over all who neglect a call from the Lord. Perception of the serious character of vocation is to be found everywhere in the works of the fathers.¹ The gentle St Augustine and the violent St Jerome, each in his own style, condemn any delay in answering the call. *Vocat te Oriens et tu attendis ad occidentem*, Augustine exclaims indignantly (The rising Sun, i.e. Christ, is calling you and you look towards the west, i.e. in the direction of fallen man). And Jerome urges Heliodorus to deal severely with anyone trying to bar his way to the monastic life, even if it should be his own father. 'If your father should prostrate himself before you at the door, tread your father down and go on . . . In this case the only way for you to show your affection for your father is to be cruel to him.' *Licet in limine pater faceat, percalcato perge patre . . . Solum pietatis genus est in hac re esse crudelem*. How could he give such pitiless directions unless the following of Christ were a matter of obligation?

Cassian compares the monastic state to the charismata by which the mystical body of Christ is constituted in the diversity of its organs. This would make it impossible for him to admit a refusal to follow the call. For St John Climacus, vocation can be compared to the call of a king recruiting soldiers. 'Since we are called to this heavenly army,' he says, 'by the King of kings and Lord of lords, and God of gods himself, let us be careful not to

¹ Cf. L. Sempé, article on *Vocation* in the *Dict. Théol. Cath.* t. 14, col. 3148-3181, from which the majority of the following quotations are borrowed.

despise his call out of indifference and laziness, for fear we should find ourselves defenceless before his great judgment seat.'¹

St Bernard has eloquent variations on the same theme. Speaking of worldly wisdom, he says : 'It tells you to be careful. But why ? As you have no doubt that the call is from God what need have you of discussion ? When the Angel of great counsel is calling you, why do you wait for other counsels ? Is there anyone wiser or more faithful than he ? Seduce me, Lord, and I shall be seduced ; show yourself the stronger and prevail over me.'²

St Thomas makes no direct study of the obligation attached to vocation but, faithfully echoing tradition as expressed in the fathers, attacks delay in answering the divine call so vigorously that it is easy to see what he thinks about the question. Chapter IX of the *Contra retrahentes homines ab ingressu religionis* might well be quoted in full. 'You are doing a wrong to Christ, in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge if after hearing his counsel, you consider that recourse should be had to the counsel of a mortal man.'³ 'If the Creator's voice were heard speaking outside the soul, it would require instant obedience, as they admit. The inner speaking, then, by which the Holy Ghost makes impressions on the mind, is all the more to be obeyed without hesitation and not resisted.'⁴ 'He makes a violent attack on everything that looks like resistance or delay. For him, it is characteristic of the sons of God to be led towards the good by the impulse of grace without waiting for counsel.'⁵ 'Those who try to hold someone back by lengthy consultations when he has been moved by the Holy Ghost, either do not realise that the power of the Holy Ghost is operating or else are determined to resist it.'⁶ St Thomas calls Aristotle to the rescue, for Aristotle himself speaks of a divine inspiration after which it is unnecessary to weigh the pros and cons of the case. 'People calling themselves Catholics ought to be ashamed to send the divinely-inspired to

¹ *Scala Paradisi*, Gradus I, P.G. 88, col. 640A.

² *Ganfridi Abbatis Declamationes . . . ex S. Bernardi sermonibus collectae*. 27. 33 ; P.L. 184, col. 456A.

³ Ed. Mandonnet, p. 250.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁵ Ed. Mandonnet, p. 292.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

receive human counsels, when the pagan philosopher declares that they do not need them.’¹

The precise problem of the obligation of vocation seems to have been brought into theological discussions much later, and even then indirectly. The great question under discussion in St Thomas’s day was about entering religion. It was in function of that that theologians were led to study the culpability of parents, friends and advisers preventing people from embracing the religious life. An argument was put forward freeing them from blame, since it is only an evangelical counsel and not a precept that is in question, no sin is committed by those who have simply been induced to turn away from an optional good. Therefore those who so induce them do not sin either. This is the way the problem is put by Lessius in his book on the choice of a state of life and entry into religion.² St Alphonsus Liguori in his *Moral Theology* explicitly raises the question ‘whether and how anyone called by God to religion sins if he neglects to carry out his vocation’; *an et quomodo aliquis a Deo vocatus ad religionem peccat si vocationem suam negliget adimplere?*³

From this time the opposition of the counsel to the precept took a leading place in the dispute. The doubt to which it gave rise concerning the culpability of refusal seems to have been found embarrassing. St Alphonsus himself, after setting forth the reasons pointing to the conclusion that refusal cannot be free from sin, finally protests that he has no intention of settling the question: *nolo in hoc puncto absolutum iudicium proferre; sapientibus illud remitto.*

Various external circumstances doubtless favoured the modern trend of opinion on the question. Seventeenth century ideas on predestination would tend to give vocation the absolute quality of a divine decree, which cannot in any way be avoided. On the other hand, in the eyes of Jansenist rigorists, shirking a vocation, like embarking on the religious life or the priesthood without one, was a sign of almost inevitable reprobation. Obviously a reaction was needed against these excesses.

¹ Ibid., p. 293.

² *De statu vitae deligendo et religionis ingressu*, Anvers, 1613.

³ *Theologia moralis*, Lib. IV, Dub. IV, n. 78; ed. Gaudé, t. 2, pp. 506-8.

Whatever the historical reasons may be, theologians today are divided between two tendencies. Some stress the absence of obligation, though they are ready to admit that refusal can in practice be culpable. Others, while recognising that in theory vocation does not of itself create obligation, dwell on the dangers and disadvantages of refusal.¹

II. VOCATION AND PRECEPT

What seems to have been the predominant consideration in all this discussion is that vocation does not depend on any positive precept. Father Sempé, for instance, writes in his article on vocation in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (t. 15, col. 3155):

A religious vocation does not create an obligation in conscience unless there is a special sign from God making it obligatory in a given case, or unless the person has so peculiar a character that he needs the religious life for his salvation. Obviously, anyone receiving a vocation would do well to follow it . . . But it cannot be said as a general rule that there is sin in refusing a religious vocation. The reason for this lies in the essential difference between the precepts and the counsels: the precepts, being indispensable to salvation, are obligatory while the counsels, which are not necessary but only useful to salvation, remain optional.

This is evident from Christ's answer to the rich young man.

A great deal might be said about this passage, but for the moment we will consider the last part only.

It is quite clear that religious vocation is not a matter of precept.² The vocation of the rich young man shows that it is to be found in a perfection over and above what was enjoined by the Law. Other texts from the gospels point in the same direction, e.g. Matthew 19, 12, 'He that can take, let him take it', with regard to voluntary chastity; and St Paul confirms this teaching with all desirable precision with respect to virginity when he says, 'Now, concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the

¹ Cf. Loret, *La vocation, principe et pratique*, Editions Saint Paul, Paris, 1943.

² 'Precept' is here understood as the declaration of something absolutely and therefore universally required in view of the last end. We shall consider later the case where vocation takes the imperative form of a command from God to individual soul; but this is not a precept in the sense just defined all the same.

Lord : but I give counsel . . . And this I speak for your profit, not to cast a snare upon you . . . ' (1 Cor. 7, 25, 35).

But what is to be deduced from this first statement as to the binding force of vocation ? What does the link between 'not of precept' and 'not of obligation' amount to ? It seems to raise no difficulty for anybody. And that, surely, is why it creates a sense of discomfort.

For, if the position first taken up is that it is enough for vocation not to be of precept if it is not to be of obligation, it is difficult afterwards to bring in an obligation arising from some personal circumstance. In that case, vocation would seem to fall back again under the sway of precept and therefore be governed by the very obligation from which it had at the outset been declared free. But it is too late for that : obligation having been limited to the precept, nothing that has escaped inclusion in the precept can be a matter of obligation. Vocation is 'free', as we like to say, free for good and all.

On what grounds can its freedom be restricted after the event, so that it could be said with Father Sempé that 'a religious vocation is *ordinarily* a free vocation' ?¹ Does that mean that in *extraordinary* cases it falls under the dominion of precept ? Have the precepts an ordinary and an extraordinary sphere of activity ? The incoherence of the conclusions calls for a reconsideration of the principle which forms its starting-point.

Is it really enough that a thing has not been commanded (by precept) for it not to be of obligation ? In other words, does precept cover the whole field of obligation ? Is law the sole source of duty ? Or again, is disobedience to law the only sin ? Is obedience equivalent to morality ?

This brings us to the heights ; but the least blade of grass needs sun, and the smallest case of conscience requires to be examined in the light of first principles.

Law is a dictate of reason expressing the requirements of the common good. When the law in question is the divine law, its requirements are those of the universal community created and governed by God. The eternal law in us is a participation in the divine reason that governs the universe ; human law applies in greater detail to the particular and singular what has been

¹ Loc. cit.

determined by the eternal law. But God has been pleased to give us a divine positive law, capable of guiding us in our supernatural life, for which purpose natural reason is insufficient. It gives us more reliable information about good and evil, specifies the intrinsic requirements of the good in greater detail and adds more effective sanctions. This divine law has taken more than one form, an imperfect one in the Old Testament, a perfect one in the New.¹

St Thomas divides the content of this new law into two parts. To the first belong acts necessarily in harmony with the grace that is in the soul (i.e. faith working through charity), or in opposition to it. These form the object of the precepts and prohibitions (e.g. denying the faith is forbidden). Acts not necessarily related by harmony or contrariety to living faith form the other part. 'Such works,' St Thomas says, 'were not prescribed or forbidden in the new law at its institution; they were left by the legislator (i.e. by Christ) to the individual according to the needs of his proper functions. Thus, in this sphere, everyone is free to decide what is advisable for him to do or avoid, and everyone in authority is free to tell his subjects what they must do or avoid' (I-II, 108, 1).

Similarly, in the next article St Thomas considers those decisions about divine worship or judicial affairs which are left to human judgment, whether the judgment of subjects, in what concerns them personally, or the judgment of spiritual or temporal rulers when it is a question of things concerning the common good.

Thus, for St Thomas, there are in moral conduct certain decisions made not by the divine law itself but by man freely acting under that law and taking responsibility as an individual or leader. Notice the parallel between the two cases. Commanding a group of people over whom I have authority and deciding my own conduct are two analogous ways of using the freedom allowed me by the gospel in matters for which God has not provided by precept. How could the orders I give my subjects create an obligation for them if the orders I give myself did not create an obligation for me?

The fact that I am not acting under command or prohibition

¹ Summa. Theol. 1a. IIae. q. 91. .

cannot make my decision morally indifferent. If the divine law leaves me room to move about in, it does so not to lessen my responsibility, but rather to increase it. I cannot consider myself exempt from all duty, with no account to render, plunged into a sort of moral void, without any terms of reference or spiritual co-ordinates, merely because obligation is not dogging me in the shape of a precept or prohibition. My nature and end and God himself cannot suddenly be put out of sight so that I can have unconditional enjoyment of my liberty. It is, in fact, precisely by this use of my liberty that I shall be judged before God, according to my nature and my end. Far from evading my end, now is the time when I show how attached I am to it. We cannot possibly imagine that God has made holes in his providential plan for our moments of freedom to drop out of, or suppose that he has not the slightest interest in anything we do unless it depends on his commandments.

The morality of an act cannot be gauged, then, merely by considering the relation of the act to the precepts. A choice which would be indifferent from the point of view of the precept is not so from the point of view of good and evil, merit and demerit. At no time do our lives cease to be a moral commitment; our acts have not all the same value, but they have each of them a significance and scope of their own, and we shall one day have to give an account of them. I cannot possibly abstract from space and time, from my physical, psychological or ideological environment, from my own spiritual history, the history of the world or the history of salvation, to take refuge in some morally neutral universe. Even a decision where the evangelical counsels do not come in, such as the choice of a secular career, is not free in the sense that I shall not have to answer for it on the pretext that there is no commandment obliging me to be an engineer rather than a doctor. The social situation and my personal circumstances may very well make it a matter of duty for me to play a particular part in society. The repercussion of my acts of choice on the mystical body of Christ, rather than on any other group of men, ought to set me thinking, for there is in the Church a solidarity that cannot be shaken off: we have seen that Cassian uses this fact as an argument in favour of fidelity to monastic vocation.

Actually, being free with regard to precepts does not mean

being without ties or obligation to the world or to God. A false idea of what precepts are goes with a false idea of freedom. Freedom is good and desirable when it delivers us from a dependence on things which is excessive and so contrary to our good, not from the normal, providential kinds of dependence, which conditions our lives as creatures and their issue in heaven. If it were possible to break loose from God and what he requires of us as our creator and end, it would be like committing ontological suicide. True freedom comes out not in rebellion against God but in adherence to him. Love does not abolish the bonds that tie us to him ; it consecrates them. It has not to wait for legal regulations before it can tell what the Beloved requires of it ; though far from shielding itself against them, it rushes out to meet them. It has no thought of claiming independence ; it offers itself spontaneously for God to draw it to himself.

If the word 'obedience' is used to express this entire submission befitting the creature in the sight of its God, it cannot be in the strict sense of the word (cf. II-II, 104, 2 ad 1). In a looser sense, it is true that the moral life is all obedience, because it is nothing but conformity to the thought and will of God, submission to the Spirit of love. But the will of God is not shown to us in the form of commandments and prohibitions. What God wants us to will comes to our knowledge chiefly (*praecipue*, St Thomas says in art. 4 ad 3) through the commandments ; the commandments are thus not the only way by which the will of God is made known. Hence permission, the *fait accomplie* or the act which itself declares the intention behind it, and counsel are commonly given as signs of the will of God (I, 19, 12). If there is any question of obedience to the will of God as thus made known, it can only be in the looser sense.

The scope of obedience properly so-called is simply that which is commanded by a lawful superior, precisely in so far as it is commanded and not the same action done for any other reason. Being obedient, as such, involves facing a command as such. It cannot, therefore, cover the full extent or the full depth of the moral field : the full extent because there are other things in morals besides commands ; the full depth, because the thing commanded may derive its value more from some other source than from the fact of being commanded. Thus faith, for instance,

is superior to obedience, since it is through faith that we know God's sovereign authority, which is at the basis of his right to be obeyed (II-II, 104, 3 ad 2).

Preoccupation with obeying, with the practice of the particular virtue of obedience, with conformity to what is prescribed by God's commandments could never, then, become the sole aim of the moral life, nor even the predominant one.

Besides, we should be betraying the virtue of obedience itself if we limited our horizon to the orders we receive, taking them as absolutes instead of referring them to those supreme goods whose requirements it is their purpose to make known to us. When God gives us commandments, it is not to dispense us from understanding and willing what he wants us to reach through them, but to help us to see God himself. We should not then see in his commandments an encouragement to mental laziness and machine-like passivity—quite the contrary : they are a means of economising strength and travelling more quickly, safely and efficaciously along the ways of his wisdom and love.

We cannot take the good centurion in the gospel as our moral ideal, however admirable he may be in his way, since for him it is all a question of orders, given by one person and carried out by another. We are committed to work for God much more deeply and personally than that, and we cannot suppose that exact obedience is all that is asked of us. The morality of the gospel binds us to God much more closely than the external kind of justice followed in the Old Testament, a thing similar to ordinary human justice with its codes and formulas. It is in this respect especially that the gospel morality perfects the morality of the Old Testament. To reduce it to a code would be to disfigure it completely. Precepts play a relatively small part in it, but the breathing-space so gained externally is there only because internally the exigencies are much more far-reaching. The Holy Ghost gives us impulses enabling us to respond to these exigencies with ease (I-II, 107, 4 ; 108, 1 ad 2). If the name 'Law' is still to be given to the morality of the gospel, it can be done only by stretching the meaning of the word to a considerable extent, so as to say with St Thomas that the new law consists ' principally in the grace of the Holy Ghost which is given to Christ's faithful', and secondarily in the written or oral regulations made with the

object of preparing the faithful for this grace and helping them to make good use of it (I-II, 106, 1).

Let us now return to the question of vocation and consider it in the light of these general principles. Our initial statement, that following a vocation is a matter not of precept but of counsel, still stands ; but we now know that we must not identify 'not imposed by precept' with 'not of obligation'. We must distinguish between obligation founded on precept, *ex vi praecepti*, and obligation resulting from the will of God manifested in any other way, *ex voluntate Dei quomodocumque manifestata*. That vocation is not of obligation *ex vi praecepti*, *concedo* : by force of precept—'I agree'. That is not of obligation at all *faveas probare* : 'please prove'—is by no means proven.

One ground of obligation is excluded but not necessarily every ground. Absolutely speaking, there is no justification for saying either, 'There is an obligation to follow vocation' or 'Refusal to follow a vocation is of itself innocent'.

III. VOCATION AND COUNSEL

Could a vocation be obligatory '*ex vi consilii*,' by force of counsel ? Certainly not. The opponents of obligation are right on that point.

Obviously, counsel is the opposite of precept. 'Precepts create necessity, whereas counsels are left to the choice of the people to whom they are given' (I-II, 108, 4).

If there are counsels in the gospel while there were none in the old law, it is because counsels are so well adapted to the liberty which is characteristic of the Law of Grace. Now that man is not so much hemmed in by strict rules, there is every reason for helping him still further by showing him things that would be useful for the conduct of his life.

It was fitting, too, that as Christ is something more than a master, he should show his concern for us by intervention of another kind than authoritarian command and veto. Counsel is an act not of authority but of friendship. 'The good counsels of a friend are sweet to the soul' (Prov. 27, 9 ; quoted in the *sed contra* of the article cited). Those who give me counsel do so not in order to domineer over me, but to help me, and not to help me by binding me, as precepts do (for binding can be a kindness), but to help me

by casting light on my problems, so that when I come to make up my mind about them I shall be more likely to make a happy decision. The end directly in view here is my own advantage and not, as in the case of the precept, my subordination to a more general good. What gives the counsel value is not, as with the precept, the function of the person giving it but the advantage offered me out of pure goodwill.

What kind of obligation is created by a counsel? Am I bound to say 'Yes' and to do what I am advised to do? Not at all. There is no question of an order promulgated by a duly-constituted authority. My will is not in chains. What comes to me by way of counsel is not an intimation qualified by the absolute demands of my end, before which I could not retreat without sin. I remain free, i.e. the mere hearing of the counsel does not change the undetermined state of my will—that is not its role. I preside over my own counsels and I am not required to abdicate in favour of my counsellor (I-II, 57, 5 ad 2). Even if the action counselled were good, doing it that way would not be doing it the right way. My duty is only to *consider* the counsels I receive. A new obligation does in this way lie in the deliberations preceding my decision. It is an obligation created by the virtue of prudence, especially by that part of prudence which is called docility (II-II, 49, 3). Thus counsels do not affect my final decision in the same way as precepts: precepts determine it in themselves, counsels affect it through the previous deliberations and the act of choice. Where precepts are concerned, all my mind has to do is to accept them; as soon as I recognise their credentials, my will joins the will of the person commanding and my action follows. On the other hand, what my mind has to do with a counsel is to note it and see where it comes from; it has then to take it into account when it reflects, as prudence requires, on the various data of the problem. If the decision I finally reach is in conformity with the counsel given me, this is not because there was some authority laying the counsel on me as a matter of obedience; it is due to the value which in my prudence I have myself recognised in the counsel.

It goes without saying that a counsel will have more weight for me in my deliberations if the person giving it is well-qualified and well-disposed towards me. But it remains true that one

cannot in the strict sense talk about 'obeying' a counsel. There is no sin of disobedience with regard to vocation.

Our first conclusion was that refusal to follow a vocation is not necessarily innocent. We now add that it is not necessarily a matter of guilt either.

IV. VOCATION AND PRUDENCE

Do these two negative statements bring us any nearer the truth ?

The above conclusion embodies only the negative aspect of our analysis of the counsel. Let us now try and develop the positive side of it, i.e. the obligation created by a counsel for the prudence of the person seeking to reach a decision.

What happens when a Christian considers the purpose of his life ? He is invited to eternal life, and the invitation has the force of an imperative ; he cannot refuse it without offending God, without withdrawing from the divine order. The means without which he cannot reach heaven are obligatory. A certain number of them, such as prayer, faith, love of the brethren, forgiveness of wrongs done to us, etc., are enumerated in the decalogue and the gospels ; but there is still a boundless field of choice open to all who want to go beyond this. For them it is a question of using the impulses of the grace poured into their souls by the Holy Ghost, to reach by good behaviour the end towards which he is guiding them, and by charity to put into effect that following of God as sons and that communion with the brethren which are a preparation on earth for the life of heaven. The difficulty of the task can be measured by its sublimity. The road is strewn with pitfalls and infested by enemies. Concupiscence leaves disorder behind it, and this, together with weakness, ignorance and malice, although cured as far as their principle is concerned, leave us in a more vulnerable position. In these conditions, how can we best use our power of choice ? How shall we honour our responsibilities as the agents of our own destinies and the co-agents of other people's ? Fidelity to what is obligatory still leaves us room for choice. Of the many roads we might take, are not some better, safer and more direct than others ?

This is where the counsels come in. Christ ceases to command as our Lord and Master and Head. Instead of asserting himself,

he simply shows us the way of complete self-renunciation, in which we may walk after him. He has laid on all men the law of renunciation and the cross, but he invites those who will to sell all they have, renounce marriage and stay beside him: this is the royal road to perfection. After that, there is nothing more that can be done, no state in which eternal life can better be won.

A road like this is evidently a boon to all who consent to follow it. As all Christians are called to perfection and charity (which, like God, cannot be willed at all unless it is willed in all its fulness), all Christians are entitled to take advantage of this proposal and make use of this means which is so perfectly suited to the goal of their life.

Nevertheless, our Lord speaks of virginity as something presupposing a special gift: 'All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given' (Matt. 19,11). The perfect way is not feasible for everybody (Cf. I-II, 108, 4 ad 1). Those who realise after honest consideration of the question that they are not capable of tending towards the perfect life cannot be blamed for putting the ideal of the religious life out of their minds. In practice, these counsels of our Lord's are not addressed to them. But those who have no such obstacles ought to weigh this question of the counsels very carefully. They are nothing more than counsels. God could, of course, imperatively command a person to take up the perfect life. In that case, the person called would be bound by a strict obligation, but it would be personal to him; it would not be derived from the universal requirements of the end of man. It was in this way that Abraham was ordered to sacrifice his son. Experience proves that such cases of vocation are not mere fancy. But for all that, the perfect life does not become a general law: in itself it remains optional. Of themselves the counsels are only counsels. Therefore, those who hear them ought not to consider themselves under an obligation the moment they become aware of them. If they do consent to follow them, it will be by their own free will; there will be not only liberty of exercise (which there ought to be in every human being) but liberty of specification or choice as well. They will go into the question thoroughly and then do what they think advisable.

The counsels are only counsels, but they *are* counsels. They are of exceptional quality, the contribution of God's wisdom to

man's very limited knowledge, to guide him on the path of life.

The less knowledge a person has, the more should he have recourse to other people. It is for this reason that docility is especially necessary in children and the ignorant—and we are all ignorant children where eternal life is concerned.

The more involved the conditions in which we live, the more do we need counsel. We have to work out lines of conduct for the most varied circumstances ; we need a great deal of experience if we are to master every situation that may arise. Scripture therefore recommends the young to have recourse to the old and to distrust their own prudence : 'Lean not upon thy own prudence' (Prov. 3, 5) ; 'stand in the multitude of ancients that are wise, and join thyself from thy heart to their wisdom' (Eccli. 6, 35). The difficulties peculiar to the supernatural life, again, compel us to pay particular attention to the counsels of Christ.

Because it is Christ who speaks through the counsels, this attention will be characterised by a special note of religious gravity. Once again, the unrivalled excellence of Christ's counsels does not change them into commands (although, as we have seen, a command may be superimposed upon them), but it does lead us to rate exceptionally high the advice they give. To take no notice of them would mean want of respect for Christ ; it would also involve loss of guidance invaluable for making a good decision. This would be gravely imprudent when, by reason of its cardinal importance, the decision requires a maximum of application on our part.

Imprudence is thus likely to be the gate through which culpability first enters the soul of one refusing to follow his vocation.

The sin may be one of *precipitation* (II-II, 53, 3). This happens when, for no good reason and generally under pressure from one of the passions, a reasonable effort is not made to think things over—i.e., when such things as conscientious consideration of the data of experience and the advice of competent persons, foreseeing of the consequences, reflection, etc., are omitted. There are people who lightly dismiss the idea of the religious life in this sort of way and do not take Christ's words seriously or the inspirations of his grace. The advice given by St Ignatius of Loyola on election, and the whole of the course of reflection and

reasoning proposed by him are designed precisely to obviate this danger.

At the other extreme, others sin by excessive slowness in making up their minds. St Ignatius helps such people to get rid of a state of indecision which might be culpable.

Imprudence may also take the form of *thoughtlessness*, where there is culpable neglect of the rules for making a sound judgment (II-II, 53, 4). Here the fault is not that the grounds of the vocation have not been examined but that the necessary importance has not been attached to one element or another in them, e.g. the consequences of refusal have not been estimated at their true worth, a positive sign of vocation has been minimised, something pointing the opposite way has been much too favourably received and brought unduly to the fore. Contrariwise, some people suffer from timidity of judgment, which paralyses their minds or prevents them from giving the necessary decisiveness to their choice.

Or it may be *inconstancy*, when the decision gives way to pressure from the opposite direction or the person is frightened by difficulties (II-II, 53, 5).

Or again, it can be *negligence* properly so-called, i.e. there is a defect in the functioning of the reason because the will is slack and flabby, and this eventually diminishes the power of decision (Ibid. 54).

There are people who drop the idea of vocation like this after deciding in its favour, either because obstacles have appeared from without or because weariness within the soul has taken hold of their wills and clouded their minds.

This culpable imprudence generally has its source in other sins or vices. There is always danger that the passions will bring pressure to bear on a decision which is usually not a matter of indifference to them. Lust is particularly apt to cloud the mind (Ibid. 53, 6). Hence any enquiry into vocation ought to be accompanied by great purity and humility, the essential conditions of spiritual lucidity.

The lack of fervour which is the usual result of venial sin may also play a part. In that case want of generosity causes hesitation or retreat before the austerity of the following of Christ, the *sequela Christi*.

But whichever of these culpable causes be considered, in each case fresh guilt is incurred by reason of imprudence or negligence.

The disorder which in the practical reason is opposed to the virtue of prudence may, moreover, be bound up with resistance to the Holy Ghost, which is opposed to the gift of counsel. If precipitation, for instance, were meant to check the operation of the Holy Ghost, it would be formally in opposition to the gift. The case certainly seems to occur. This is surely the resistance to inspiration in the soul which makes some people's attitude to vocation very like disobedience and draws down the severity of the saints upon them.

Is there any way of measuring the gravity of these sins against the virtue of prudence and the gift of counsel? A few ideas put forward by St Thomas enable us to come a little closer to the problem (II-II, 53, 1 ; 54, 3).

From the point of view of the *effect*, the sin will be mortal only if the decision gravely endangers the person's salvation by depriving him of help which is practically indispensable to him. The case is exceptional, as the means of the religious life are not absolutely necessary to salvation. Yet it may happen that in fact a postulant or novice is really convinced that, short of a miracle, going back where he came from or returning to the world would be equivalent to damnation. In this connection St Alphonsus quotes St Gregory's protest against a decree of the Emperor Maurice forbidding soldiers to become monks: 'They are for the most part men who could not be saved unless they renounced everything' (P.L. 77, 663).

If, on the other hand, the person has no reason to think that he is incapable of being saved in the world, the sin of imprudence will be only venial. At least, it will as far as the effect is concerned.

The gravity of the imprudence will also depend on its cause. According to St Thomas, deliberately turning away from the divine rules of conduct is a mortal sin. This is the case, he says, 'when a man acts with precipitation because he holds in contempt what God teaches and rejects it' (II-II, 53, 1). In the same way, negligence is a mortal sin when it springs from a will so slack with regard to the things of God that the love of God fails altogether.

Here, then, are two cases, and not fanciful ones either, where the rejection of a vocation constitutes a mortal sin, even though there is no question of precept.

On the other hand, the sin will be only venial (from the point of view of the cause) if the imprudence does not imply contempt but comes simply from a lack of fervour compatible with the presence of charity.

Putting together the results of the two sets of considerations that have just been made, we come to the following conclusions :

The decision not to enter religion, without prejudice to the culpability it may incur by reason of bad dispositions in the will, dishonesty, pride (or even disobedience, in the case of someone who has received a real command to live the religious life), may offend against prudence by precipitation or excessive slowness, thoughtlessness or timidity of judgment, inconstancy or negligence.

The sin of imprudence thus committed is a grievous one if the decision deliberately exposes the person to danger of damnation, or if even without implying this consequence it proceeds from thorough contempt of God's teachings or from a complete collapse of charity.

The guilt is venial if the decision does not proceed from contempt but comes simply from lack of fervour and does not seriously endanger salvation.

Finally, there is no guilt at all if the moral dispositions are good and the decision not to enter religion has been taken without any lapse from prudence.

In practice, in judging the conscience of someone turning from a religious vocation or seeking advice before doing so, the first thing to do is to check the moral dispositions—humility, detachment, straightforwardness, charity—and then the workings of the practical reason when faced with the hypothesis of the religious life : the efforts made to note and decipher all the factors in the divine call, and the degree of fidelity all along the line to those personal acts by virtue of which the vocation itself will become increasingly firm and evident.

If people are to be helped not to come to grief over this very important matter, they must be told neither, 'You are free' because it is not of obligation, nor, 'You are bound' because it is

of itself more perfect. They must be brought into the presence of God and their own lives, led to become aware of themselves and of the divine plan around and within them, made to see what it is that fundamentally they want and what, so to say, the Holy Ghost wants in and around them, and hence, what he wants of them. If nothing definite emerges from this enquiry, they may safely be left to their own devices. If the inclination towards the perfect life becomes clearer, they should be urged to follow it. Then if they refuse, it will be difficult to clear them of at least a venial sin of imprudence. The sin may perhaps be mortal, the fruit no doubt of some other sin, which in the most serious case will be contempt of God, his word and his will. This culpability the Christian instinct and its authorised interpreters have always detected more or less behind refusal to follow Christ's call to the perfect life, even though that call does not come as one of the common precepts of the divine law.

CHAPTER III

THE RECOGNITION OF VOCATION

By A. BONDUELLE, O.P.

Having a vocation. Vocation with a capital 'V'. 'I have a vocation' ; 'She has no vocation' ; 'I thought I had a vocation, but I hadn't really' ; 'She was sure she had no vocation, but she must have had one' ; 'She certainly had a vocation, but illness or family circumstances stopped her from following it'. Remarks like these are heard often enough. They do not all seem equally happy. In some cases, too, the expression 'trying a vocation' comes almost to mean 'being examined to see if you have one or not'. It sounds a bit like a chemical or radiosopic analysis, which will tell you whether or not you have an ulcer, or a lesion of the bone or lungs. Is it not an over-simplification to affirm or deny the presence of vocation in such strict and, it might almost be said, univocal terms ? Is it really the case that religious vocation is a sort of supernatural monolith set up once and for all in the soul by the Holy Spirit, so that if it is there it cannot fail to be seen, and once it is there it will always be there, and the secret of the Christian life is simply to bring it to light ?

No theologian could think the problem well stated in these terms. Let us try and state it properly. By what signs can it be recognised that a person is called by God to the religious life ? That is the most usual way of formulating our problem. We know that God calls all Christians to be saints, i.e. to reach the perfection of the theological virtue of charity. But there is more than one way of doing this one thing ; there are widely divergent roads to the same end, different states of life, and every Christian has to choose between them with the discrimination required by supernatural prudence. Bearing in mind that God calls all the baptised to perfection and that, according to the gospels, Christ has in fact set up the state of the counsels as distinct from the other states, can we say that every Christian may freely choose between these states ? Or does God dictate the choice, by a personal call or special vocation ?

It is unquestionable that the expression 'religious vocation' has in its favour the weight of genuine tradition and the constant practice of spiritual directors and other masters of the spiritual life. Historians will no doubt be able to say at what date it made its appearance in the Church. Leaving this side of the question for a moment and considering the other side, we see that the act by which a person turns to the religious life is a decision involving an extremely important choice, as it determines a permanent state of life and therefore bears on all the moral and spiritual acts of a lifetime; the whole life is from this moment marked with a special stamp, coming from the virtue of religion and imposed, more particularly, in view of charity. However prominent the part played by religion and charity as motives of this important decision, the choice depends on supernatural prudence, because it involves planning for the future and arranging the whole of life: it is an act of supernatural discrimination. The situation is complicated. The individual has to take his bearings, try to see things clearly, classify the various factors that influence him from without as well as from within. He has to discover what may be called, from different points of view, the virtuous solution, or the reasonable one, the Christian solution, or simply duty, or to speak in simpler and more traditional terms, the will of God. The advice given by all spiritual directors is the same: 'Do what you can to find out what is God's will for you'.

By speaking of the will of God instead of vocation, we are obviously putting things on to a much broader and more general footing. There is certainly no more traditional or fully Christian expression than 'doing the will of God'. The rule by which Christ measured his conduct from the beginning of his life to the end was his Father's will, and he made this law of conformity to the divine will the criterion by which all his future disciples might judge of their fidelity to him. Likewise, St Thomas says that acting well and doing the will of God are exactly the same thing. St Teresa of Lisieux is an outstanding example of a person acting on these lines. The will of God in question here is not, of course, the *voluntas beneplaciti* (Summa I, 19, 11), which embraces all that ever has been, is, or will be, but the *voluntas signi*, his will as presented to man for his free acceptance or

refusal. It is superfluous to add that the will of God taken in this sense is not the same thing as predestination, either for thomists or for molinists. Being called to God by sanctity is not synonymous with being predestined to sanctity. All who are predestined to sanctity are necessarily called to it, but the reverse is not true, it is possible to be called to sanctity, without being predestined to it.

If we mean to express religious vocation in terms of the will of God, shall we have to say that vocation is a particular instance of the will of God ? It would be the will of God as applied to the act of free will, the means by which choice is made of a state of life. But why should the use of the word 'vocation' be restricted like this ? It is universally accepted for the Christian vocation in general, it is for religious vocation and more and more it is coming to be used for the married state ; it is coming into much more common use for all sorts of intermediate states in which the laity are working as apostles to-day. Some theologians allow the use of the word with regard to the choice of a career or profession, while others do not ; the question is whether we may speak of a soldier's vocation, a doctor's, a lawyer's, the vocation of a teaching sister or lay school-mistress, the vocation of a social or charitable worker, and so on.

In current speech we do not use the two terms indifferently. If I say, for instance, 'It is the will of God, manifested as a counsel, that I should go to vespers on Sundays', no-one will suppose that this is a vocation.

Can it be said that there is no vocation unless the will of God bears on an act involving the whole of a person's life ? Or again, that the difference between vocation and the ordinary will of God is that the ordinary will of God is manifested by providential circumstances while vocation is made known in some other way ? In that case, the way in which vocation is made manifest would be different from the way in which we know all the other things that God wills for us. These are two possible criteria of the difference between 'vocation' and 'the will of God'.

The first one will bear a good deal of qualification. If a seminarist in deacon's orders, whose vocation has never given the slightest cause for doubt or the least grounds for anxiety, falls ill a week before his ordination with a disease preventing him

from ever receiving the priesthood, are we, or are we not, to say that he had a vocation ? If a young married man, after five years' imprisonment in an enemy country, comes back and finds that his wife has been unfaithful and left him for good, has he from that time onwards a vocation to perfect chastity ? It is certainly the will of God that he should live in continence, and this as a matter of precept, not just by way of counsel. Are we to say that he had a vocation to celibacy before or not ? We cannot say that it is merely a question of words. These simple remarks, which are neither truisms nor paradoxes, contain a moral truth of the highest importance.

I know a woman, a good Christian and the mother of a family, whose inner life was really poisoned by the thought that she had refused to follow her vocation. 'When I was eighteen,' she said, 'I deliberately rejected the idea of a religious vocation and would not even consider it, because I had a "purely natural inclination" towards marriage. I love my husband, who is a good Christian, and the children born of this union I bring up as well as I can but my conscience is never at rest. My life is rotten at its foundations. It was all spoilt at the start and no good can come out of it. I can do no good because I am not following my vocation.' I calmed her by assuring her that if when she was eighteen the will of God had been that she should become a religious, and if she had perhaps committed a grievous sin by resisting, the will of God from now on, *hic et nunc*, was that she should be a perfect wife and mother, and that she should be so not in sadness brought on by scruples and remorse, but with joy in serving God and with love and confidence. Even if there had been a grave sin at the age of eighteen, once she had repented of it, confessed it and had it forgiven, she could not make the whole of her spiritual life revolve round this past act without being lacking in the virtue of hope. Henceforward her vocation was unquestionably to be a wife and mother, even though when she was eighteen it was, or might have been, to live the religious life.

The same reasoning applies to all other cases of the kind. In the case of the deacon with health too bad to go on to the priesthood in spite of his obvious vocation, it was the will of God that he should go to the seminary, stay there until he had been ordained deacon, be a deacon and then remain ill as a deacon till

the end of his days. It cannot be said that the will of God was that he should one day become a priest. God's will for a given soul is considered as it is in God himself, it is seen to be one single timeless thing, although it bears on all the successive stages of the soul's existence, from the first to the last, whereas in the soul it is subject to time and succession. There is something willed by God for every moment and every period in a person's life, however disconcerting it may appear, however inconsistent some may think the Master's conduct in their regard.

This truth is especially noticeable in the case of some of the great founders of religious orders, who came by the most roundabout ways, with false starts and changes from one congregation to another, to the most unexpected conclusions, and this in perfect obedience to the Spirit, who all the time was not contradicting himself but leading them from one stage of their lives to another.

Religious vocation is a form of the will of God like any other, but it is much more serious than most, as it involves the whole of a person's life.

What about the other criterion : namely that the will of God and religious vocation differ by the ways in which they are made known to us ? This brings us to the heart of our subject. My own opinion is, precisely, that *there is no essential or specific difference between the way in which God shows someone that he is counselling him to enter religion, and the way in which he shows his will in general to all Christians in all circumstances; i.e., his will concerning their duty and the choice they have to make in their actions between the good, the better and the most perfect.*¹

I cannot see what theological principle or fact of experience could be made to support the theory that there is an essential difference between the ways in which God manifests his will in these two cases.

Miraculous vocations are, of course, exceptional : I think that all theologians are agreed on that point. St Paul is the great example. But the Lord uses this method for indicating other duties, less important than entering on the religious life : there

¹ I say this without any idea of joining in the famous controversy about the obligation of doing the most perfect thing : that is entirely outside my terms of reference. I am simply treating the question as to how the will of God can be ascertained in the given case of religious vocation,

are many instances in which he has intervened miraculously to show a particular person his duty in particular circumstances, even where there is no question of the religious life. There are then miraculous vocations, which are exceptional and very few in number, and there are vocations which, without being miraculous, are at least extraordinary. Vocations like those of Benedict Labre and Charles de Foucauld belong to this category. The story of Fr de Foucauld's conversion belongs to the borderland between miracle and a kind of grace so remarkable as to be almost perceptible to the senses, as it were. You remember his confession to the Abbé Huvelin, the development of his vocation, his stay with the Trappists, and the rest . . .

But this need not detain us, as everybody agrees that cases of this sort are the exception. When God speaks as clearly as that, there is no need to ask what ought to be done. St Paul did not need to assemble a whole jury of spiritual directors before he could tell whether he ought to become a Christian or not. In cases like this, everything is settled beforehand. But these cases are neither the usual nor the difficult ones. What we must look for is the essential, normal, specific criterion enabling us to ascertain the presence or absence of vocation.

Besides miraculous and extraordinary vocations, one might perhaps speak of vocations based on 'providential signs', in concocting which the imagination (of both director and directed) shows itself so prodigiously fertile. I am thinking of pious coincidences, the recurrence of certain dates, series of accidents called providential, ingenious rapprochements of names, anniversaries, events, and so forth. I may seem to be caricaturing the facts, but simple souls are always on the watch for providential signs and take for such what is a matter of pure chance. I know that chance comes under providence, but these good people mix up the providential with the miraculous. Above all, in Christian circles people are so often in the habit of giving the name providential to only one class of events: happy ones. As if the others were not providential at all. In any case, this sort of thing will not give us the formal solution of our problem, which is to know how to recognise a vocation in a person who has not been the object of a miraculous favour, a vocation which is not exceptional and not adequately known from providential signs.

Everyone agrees that this is the most frequent case, the one we are so often teased by.

We can conveniently group our thoughts on the question under the headings of aptitude, attraction and grace. I will deal with aptitude in connection with the religious life in general, and not with regard to any particular congregation.

What are the essentials of the religious life ? As far as the means are concerned—not the end, which is the determination to become perfect—there is one element which, if judged by the criteria given in the gospels, admits of no doubt, and that is the vows. The other element, which has recently given rise to so much controversy, is life in common. In what sense and to what extent is this an essential and irreplaceable element of the religious life ? And hence, does the call to the common life form part of the call to the religious life or not ?

If I am considering the vows as such, apart from any specific details concerning particular congregations, what can I say about individual aptitudes for making the vows ? In what sense could it be said that a given Christian is not a suitable person to make the vow of poverty—always abstracting from the common life, of which we shall speak later ? It is quite evident that there can be no question of suitability or unsuitability : even if someone felt himself remarkably suited to the possession of riches, comfort or the management of enormous business-concerns, still no-one could say that he was unsuited to the religious life.

It is just as clear for the vow of chastity. I remember a very experienced religious saying to me that unsuitability for this vow is caused much less by violence of instinct than by disease, abnormality or deficiency in the instinct. A normal person, even if endowed with powerful instincts, ought certainly not to be ruled out *a priori* ; he is not incapable of taking the vow of chastity. I agreed with him. Dr Carrel writes in his book, *Man the Unknown*, that 'the saints are as a rule strongly sexed, but they have enough will-power to control their instincts'. Sanctity is realistic ; it faces the facts. Grace works in harmony with nature, and the strongest instincts can provide occasions for human and virtuous action. Unsuitability for the vow of chastity is thus much more likely to come from physical abnormality than from the vigour normal to a good natural endowment.

Can we speak of aptitude for obedience ? Even the most self-reliant characters, those least disposed to submission, cannot be said to be unsuited to the religious life. Otherwise one might as well say that religious vocation demands less in the way of human qualities than life in the world.

The same could be said of life in common : unsuitability for it will come from abnormality rather than from personal vitality. So that from the doctrinal point of view, these short considerations on aptitude could be expressed in very few words : some people obviously have no aptitude for the religious life. But the aptitude in question here belongs to the same domain as human qualities in general, and the position seems one of ambivalence. Aptitude gives us nothing in the way of a positive criterion of vocation. If you have no aptitude, then obviously God is not calling you. But if you have an aptitude for the religious state you have one for all the other states as well, because to this aptitude corresponds possession of all the other human qualities which would make for success in any state of life—and no conclusion can be drawn from it.

Shall we be better informed if we take attraction to the religious life as the criterion of vocation ? I once read a little book by the late Father Groussau, S.J., entitled *Si vis*, and another by Father Perbal, O.M.I., on the same subject. Nothing could be simpler than what was taught in these two works ; the call Christ makes through the gospels is addressed to us all, and any who will may answer it. It thus becomes a matter of personal generosity, not of an individual call from the Lord. These writers take their stand on the gospels, on St Thomas Aquinas, even on canon 538 of the Code, which says that the religious life is open to 'all Catholics'. If this theory has the merit of being clear, it has against it the almost unanimous opinion of theologians : *everybody is not called by God to the religious life*. The case of the rich young man is quoted as one in which the person is not consciously attracted to the religious life. Is it then enough if the inclination is in the will alone, a naked leaning devoid of all sensible attraction ? If so, the attraction exercised by the religious life would have to be compared to the attraction of generosity, pure love of God and absolute renunciation to a man who during a war wanted to take the place of a hostage waiting to be shot. But this is

hardly the way in which Christian tradition speaks of the attraction the religious life has for people. I even knew a spiritual director who thought it necessary to go counter to nature in everything, particularly in the choice of a religious vocation. 'Choose the religious life because you dislike it. Choose the order you most dislike in the religious life. Then you will be sure of doing the will of God' !

Besides, it is not so easy to determine the boundary between what is sensible and what belongs to the will alone ; the points of contact between soul and body are by no means as evident as all that. We must take care not to make our antitheses and our dialectic too simple. I do not think the question can be put as an alternative between sensible attraction and attraction of the will.

May it be that here again there is a sort of ambivalence and that a thorough search will always in the end bring to light some sort of sensible attraction to the religious life in any Christian, however much his other reflexes may be opposed to it ? This is, after all, not impossible ; it seems that in the depths of consciousness attraction and aversion are not incompatible. Some psychologists say that the young, and especially the adolescent, feel attracted to contradictory things at every level of their consciousness. But if we continue along these lines we shall be in danger of being shut inside a vicious circle. What is the exact meaning of our Lord's '*si vis*' in the gospel ? Those who say that an act of will is enough do not solve the problem. Neither do those who speak simply of grace, whether it be the grace of the virtues and the sacraments or the grace of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, particularly the gift of counsel.

To begin with, let us remind ourselves that grace is a thing not perceptible to the senses ; more than that, it is strictly speaking impossible to be aware of it as such in the consciousness. It is the object of faith, like the real presence and the holy Trinity. This is true of actual as well as of habitual grace, and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost as well.

Next we must observe that the grace which gives most light, the grace which best shows the soul what it ought to see, is like a fire enabling things to be seen in its light, while remaining itself invisible. To make a rather rough comparison (but it will do well enough in the circumstances, as we are concerned with finding a

path or road), it might be said that vocation is revealed by grace more as a road is revealed by the headlights of a car, rather than it is by the lamps at the sides of it. Some would have it that when we try to identify the grace in a soul, we are making out its vocation rather as the driver of a car looks in front of him and sees the road marked out by the lamps. I think it is better that in this affair all the supernatural elements, all that goes with prudence and the gift of counsel, should be considered as the beam lighting up the road and revealing all the circumstances necessary for the formation of a prudent judgment. The normal function of grace and the gift of counsel is to enlighten the mind and so enable it to form a practical judgment. Grace, then, strengthens the will and brings the sensibility into submission, as we all know from tradition.

The position I finally came to is this—the essence of this question of vocation might well be the statement that grace, especially the grace of vocation, makes people produce different judgments about data which may be the same.

Take two people obviously suited to the religious life and each possessing the same degree of generosity, and suppose that all the circumstances are the same for both. The Lord will bring each of them to judge differently and make a different choice and decision ; yet both will act freely and have excellent reasons for what they do. Objectively there will be nothing inevitable in their conclusions, nothing to tip the scales in one direction or the other. Both are seeking Christian perfection, yet one will choose the cloister and the other marriage. There is nothing surprising in that : man is supremely free when he is led by grace. This is surely the point at which we shall at last track down the mysteries of God's ways. A choice like this, reached in an atmosphere of special detachment, surely belongs particularly to human freedom, grace and the gift of counsel. When you go deeply into the question, you find that there is a sort of absolute indifference, resolved by grace alone, which is in itself incapable of being felt or grasped. So that if a person were asked why he had chosen the religious life and what signs had guided him, he might answer : 'I cannot tell you . . . The time came for me to make the choice ; I was sure it was the right thing to do. But there was nothing miraculous about it, there were no providential

signs . . . ' Such is the strange and mysterious way—and for that reason the usual way—in which men are guided by divine grace. If it is true that the essence of human freedom is that the will should act spontaneously when it makes its decisions, it can be said that the human will determines the will of God, in the sense that the Lord does not provide the soul with any special objective criterion of his will but moves it from within. The choice is made by God but it is also made by the human being, co-operating with grace, choosing freely with the highest kind of liberty, perfectly docile to the Spirit of God and absolutely indifferent to everything that is not of God.

My conclusions could, then, be expressed more or less like this :

1. There is no essential difference between the way in which God makes his will known in the case of religious vocation and the way in which he manifests it in the case of any of the precepts or counsels.

2. Unless there are miracles or providential signs of an extraordinary kind, the decision is made by the person himself, acting in accordance with the usual laws of supernatural prudence, i.e. judging by objective external criteria.

3. Signs of absence of vocation, i.e. lack of aptitude are found principally among the weak and the abnormal. A normal person is essentially suited to the practice of poverty, chastity, obedience, and even life in common.

4. Attraction to the religious life, whether it be sensible, voluntary or supernatural, is not an absolute criterion of vocation.

5. Vocation is not given to all who would like it. The Lord wills (*voluntate signi*) that one person should be a religious, and another should marry.

6. Grace is not an objective criterion of vocation : it throws light on the question, but remains invisible itself.

7. In the last analysis, vocation occurs when, under the influence of grace, with docility and freedom, the soul makes the decision chosen for it by God, and this through criteria which are objective, external and valid, though not of themselves conclusive.

CHAPTER IV

THE RECOGNITION OF A CONTEMPLATIVE VOCATION

By FRANÇOIS DE SAINTE-MARIE, O.C.D.

As the subject is clearly defined, it will be enough if we start from the common and almost universally-accepted idea of vocation to the religious life as something resulting from a special call from God. As a rule the only way of hearing this call is to listen to the echo it awakens in the soul : the firm determination to belong to God. But this determination is not enough ; it must be accompanied by the physical and moral qualities necessary for leading the religious life. The fact that the usual judges of a person's fitness in this respect are superiors speaking in the name of the Church does not deprive vocation of its personal character.

The following pages are the fruit of an enquiry conducted in a score or so of Carmelite convents. An attempt has been made to pick out from the answers given those general points which seem to be applicable to all forms of the contemplative life. They concern the divine call and the individual response to it, the qualities required, the examination of the postulant by the superiors and the testing of the vocation outside and inside the enclosure.

I. THE CALL FROM GOD

In any question of vocation the difficulty is much more to see whether there is a 'call' than to examine the fitness of the person concerned. Is this person who in other respects has the required qualities called by God or not ?

It is generally impossible to hear the call itself ; its existence has to be inferred indirectly from the mysterious attraction the religious life has for the person. Some of the replies, however, stress the fact that by reason of its pre-eminence the contemplative life requires particularly clear evidence of choice by God. They quote the text 'You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you' (John 15, 16) and they add that 'desire for this state of life

because it is safer or more perfect than others is inadmissible . . . Because it is so excellent a state, the contemplative life undoubtedly demands a clearer call.’¹

People are sometimes to be met with in convents who have received an explicit call of this sort. St Ignatius himself is ready to allow a form of vocation based on an impouring of light so bright that resistance seems impossible or so continual that in the end the free will will give its consent.

Other vocations have developed in strange circumstances. These have now come to light and with the passage of time it has been possible to check them. The vocation of Mother Mary of Jesus, the foundress of the Carmel at Montmartre and the Carmel du Reposoir is a call in point. After her conversion and while she was still living in the world, she had the idea of giving herself to God. She obtained her director’s approval and thought of joining the Carmelites. Then one day she saw in imagination the entrance to an unknown convent, which was in fact the one where she was to find God. A ray of sunlight was shining through a light shower on the simple convent door. She wondered where she could find the Carmel she had seen in this mysterious way and she decided to look for it all over France and even in Flanders. One of the earliest stages of the search took her to Paray-le-Monial for a friend’s clothing. It was raining the day she arrived and she climbed the hill overlooking Carmel. As the sun shone through the last drops of a light shower she was thrilled to recognise the door she had seen in the light which God had given her before. Without stopping to think, she went into the little chapel and knelt down on the bare floor. Hardly had she done so when in the depths of her heart she heard the words, ‘This is your resting place’.²

Obviously, vocations like this must be very closely enquired into to see if they are genuine, and the sign apparently coming from God must be succeeded by a detailed examination of the case. But we must still believe that even in the twentieth century when he wants to and for reasons known to himself alone, God

¹ As a general rule replies to the enquiry will be given in inverted commas when they are quoted textually. Because the writers must remain anonymous no references can be given.

² These details are taken from her obituary notice.

can show people as decisively as this what he chooses to have them do. And it seems that however rare such calls may be, they will be met with chiefly among contemplatives.

Sometimes the form they take is not quite so extraordinary. They will then have appeared to the persons concerned as a sort of inevitable necessity ever since their childhood. Sister Bernadette, a nun at the Carmelite convent in Beauvais who died in the odour of sanctity, was only three when she began to say, 'I am going to be a Carmelite'. When a call received like this by someone as yet incapable of understanding its implications is nevertheless eventually implemented by an outstandingly successful religious life, it is difficult not to see it as a very special intervention of God. That is why some vocations are said to be 'inborn'. 'I have never dreamed of anything but Carmel. From my earliest childhood, or my first communion, I have been convinced that I could never belong to anyone but God.' Sometimes the surroundings were not at all Christian, but still these people were faithful to the light, however imperfectly they understood it, and it kept them in touch with God.

Other vocations become clear retrospectively, when the person comes into contact with the teaching or life of the religious order which, unknown to himself, he was meant to enter. That was what he was looking for, although he was unable to express it even to himself. So true is it that all is grist to the mills of God, who uses the most unexpected means for transmitting his call.

Of course, side by side with the few genuine forms of extraordinary vocations which, though genuine, still have need of proof, many counterfeits are to be met with in this field. For this reason, greater thoroughness is required in testing vocations based on extraordinary motives such as words heard within the soul, or the conviction that the person has to make reparation for a member of the family . . . It would be terrible to build a life on illusion.

The most usual thing is for God's call to the contemplative life simply to take the form of a certain experience of him. It seems necessary for the soul not merely to be attracted to the life of prayer but already to have experienced it. 'You would not be seeking me unless you had already found me.' There is no question here of mystical grace properly so-called but rather of a

taste for God which, as it gradually rids itself of the sensible elements in it, will become a really deep awareness of God and the things of God. But this supposed call must be balanced by possession of the suitable qualities, which will serve to some extent as criteria for judging the vocation.

II. THE CRITERIA OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE VOCATION

A. Spiritual criteria—realisation of what is due to God and what is meant by the life of faith.

As Cardinal Suhard writes in his pastoral letter on the awareness of God's claims (*Le Sens de Dieu*), the contemplative is by his state of life essentially constituted a witness before men to the transcendence of God. He looks on God who *is*, and he stays beside him ; he rejoices that God is what he is ; he thanks him for it and sings his praises. 'Although everyone called to the religious life ought to have a particular awareness of God's claims, it would seem that the call to the contemplative life involves a more explicit and especially a more profound recognition of the transcendence of God, his sovereign rights and his unsearchable love for his creatures.'

The only thing that will enable this magnificent ideal to be put unwaveringly into practice day after day, month after month, year after year, in a monotonous and apparently useless life, is an extremely strong faith. Illusions soon fade and God seems far away ; the need for devotion to some more limited cause or for apostolic work with more tangible results, is re-awakened in the soul. There will be no possibility of standing the strain unless from the first there has been some sort of realisation, however vague, that the contemplative life requires 'people full of faith, not aiming at tangible results but capable of working in the dark without the support of their activities, so that by patiently bearing the monotony of this life they become worthy that God should work in their souls'. The conviction will also be needed that the contemplative life consists of 'being about the Father's business' (Luke 2,49), and not about one's own, that it is exclusively for the service of God and not for the furtherance of one's own ambitions, however spiritual they may be. A too eager and self-interested search for perfection is far from being

a sure sign of vocation to the contemplative life. All that St Benedict requires of the novice in his Rule is that he should really be seeking God, and be zealous for the work of God and for obedience and the unpleasant tasks of the religious life : *si vere Deum quaerit et si sollicitus est ad opus Dei, ad obedientiam, ad opprobria*.¹

This does not mean that people leading the contemplative life know nothing about anything except God or have no gifts except the spirit of prayer ; but they link up all their activity with God, their vision penetrates things and they see God therein, because 'they have an amazing sense of the hierarchy of values. They can enjoy themselves and take an interest in plenty of things, but they keep permanently in mind no more than the essentials of all this.'

This sense of God's claims will obviously appear in slightly different colours in each of the different contemplative families. With the Carmelites it seems to take on a rather severe aspect. Carmelite spirituality is one of all or nothing, with all the sublimity and difficulty inherent in the quest for the Absolute. 'All who aspire after the Carmelite life should want to give themselves completely ; they should have that taste for the absolute which is so characteristic of our spirituality. Often, in fact, it is this leaning which brings a person to a decision and makes him sure that his vocation is to Carmel.' The strong inclination felt by St Teresa of the Child Jesus towards the missionary life is quoted in this connection. This inclination would have taken her to an active order, had not the prospect of a more complete gift, more pleasing to God and fruitful for the Church, led her to choose Carmel.

It goes without saying that need for the absolute is acceptable only when it proceeds from awareness of the divine absolute and not from any merely human need. Otherwise, it may be simply the fruit of a youthful enthusiasm which is fated to collapse when it comes into contact with reality. Or else it will hide a subtle form of pride, the desire to escape from an ordinary life. When it occurs in unbalanced people it will be generated by a sort of psychological compensation and will hide a considerable lack of willpower. It is thus justifiable to say that need for the absolute is not a sign of vocation to the contemplative life unless it

¹ *Regula*, c. 58,

proceeds from a sense of what is due to God and 'is accompanied by great steadiness, humility and pliability, the existence of which requires proof'.

Another criterion may be a certain awareness of the relativity of human affairs. Often a sense of what is due to God will go hand in hand with a sense of this relativity of other things. This corresponds, on the whole, to 'conversion' as it was once understood, particularly by St Benedict, as being the first stage of any vocation that went at all deep. When St Teresa speaks of the Carmelite vocation in her Constitutions, she insists on having people 'given to prayer, sincerely aspiring after perfection, *despising the world . . .*' This 'despising the world' evidently needs to be taken in the right sense. It is not the fruit of disappointment. It is by no means essential to have had great disappointments in life before being able to enter a monastery, as the romantics thought. On the contrary, it would be an obstacle. Neither is it necessary to have failed at some job in the world.

One of the replies to the enquiry notes that a 'distrust is sometimes shown towards girls who leave active apostolic work which is proving very successful and turn to the contemplative life. This is wrong. For my part I saw that it was precisely through their devotedness to good works that these girls fairly soon came to see that they could give more to God and other people in a life of prayer and sacrifice. The main thing, to my mind, is to realise that they are not coming to us because they are physically or morally tired.' This is profoundly true, and I am sorry that other replies dwell on the suspicion with which they think intelligent and active young women like these ought to be regarded. Of course they must be brought to realise the full extent of what they will have to give up if they want to do the work of God properly. But to exclude them automatically or to have no confidence in them would amount to thinking that the contemplative life is made for nonentities. There would be no great merit in despising the world just because one had been unable to make oneself a good warm place in it.

It is perfectly normal for the call to the contemplative life to be heard in the midst of action, and this not through despising action but by going beyond it. 'It is quite often in the light of the dogma of the communion of saints that in the midst of action the young

to-day become conscious of a contemplative vocation. They develop a deeper and broader way of looking at things and seeing the hierarchy of values. They gain an experiential conviction that human effort has little efficacy of itself, and this makes them look to God alone for the grace they want other people to have. They begin to see that the principal share in the work of redemption belongs to love. They understand the secret power of prayer and loving sacrifice for the sake of the whole Church.'

Thus a sense of what is due to God and a sense of the limitations of the creature are involved in the birth and growth of a vocation, to the extent of constituting its two essential criteria at the spiritual level properly so-called. But as we are not angels, we have to take other things into account besides the fundamental orientation of the soul. It remains to be seen if the person possesses the desired qualities at the physical and merely human level.

B. Well-Balanced Nerves

This is of capital importance where the contemplative life is concerned, to such an extent that with certain possible exceptions a well-balanced though not very pious person is preferable to one with weak nerves, even though he may have already experienced contemplation.

This does not mean that the contemplative orders require vigorous bodily strength. St Teresa of Avila noticed that delicate women with poor health but plenty of fervour had no difficulty over the observance of the monastic routine.¹ The reason is that the cloistered life imposes a strain not on the body but on the nervous system, first by its austerities (fasting, cold and especially lack of sleep) but also by the sheer continuity of it.

Nearly half a century ago Dom Delatte in his commentary on the Rule of St Benedict stressed the primordial importance of well-balanced nerves: 'Average health is more than adequate for what we have to do as monks. The essential thing required of a candidate for the contemplative life is temperamental balance, a thing not as common as it might be in this age of impulse and neurosis. If a weak-minded person with a faulty intellect devotes

¹ *Life*, c. 36; cf. *The Complete Works of St Teresa*, tr. E. Allison Peers, 1946. i. 261.

himself to the monastic life he will lose what little sense he has, or at any rate will become a burden to his brethren and a danger to himself'.¹ How apposite this is at the present time, when most people have had their nervous systems shaken by the shock and privation accompanying the two wars. It is more than ever necessary to exclude unbalanced people at all costs, even if the recruiting for the enclosed orders has to suffer for it.

Sometimes this lack of balance will become evident at the start ; often it will come to light only gradually. The last resources of the frail nervous system will be exhausted and then will come a fall. God grant that the disorder may be revealed while there is yet time. 'In spite of all the care we take not to admit such people,' St Teresa writes, 'the disease they are suffering from is so subtle that it remains latent when this is to its advantage, and we do not discover it until it is past curing.'²

In the opinion of many superiors, it usually takes three or four years, i.e. practically all the time up to solemn profession, before a fairly precise idea can be formed of the nervous balance of a religious. If she falls ill and there are no moral difficulties involved, it will be difficult to send her away. It will remain for the superior and her community to try and put St Teresa's sensible suggestions into practice. They have lost none of their force since they were made. They amount to this : to keep the sick person well in hand, treating her very sympathetically without being too obvious about it ; stop her from being a nuisance to the community and keep her occupied as much as possible, so as to leave her no time for giving rein to her imagination ; and from time to time deprive her of mental prayer, which for her is an occasion for introspection.

But it is better to prevent such a disaster while there is still time : 'Better make no foundation at all than put melancholic people into one. Religious like that are the ruin of convents.'³

C. Sound Judgment—Qualities of Mind and Will

Sound Judgment—Corresponding to well-balanced nerves in the field of the practical intelligence is what is commonly called

¹ *Commentaire sur la Règle de saint Benoît*. c.58, ed. 1913, p. 423 ; cf. English tr. by Dom Justin McCann, 1931, p. 370.

² *Foundations*, c. 7. Peers. iii. 36.

³ St Teresa, *Letters* (315) 299. Peers translation ii, 702.

sound judgment or commonsense. This is a quality absolutely essential to contemplatives ; it is in a way even more necessary for them than for people in the world. As living in the cloister restricts the field of those experiences which help to form the judgment and keep it close to reality, it is likely of its very nature to warp the mind a little. Which is a further reason for demanding from postulants as sound an estimate of the real as possible. 'If the person is lacking in judgment,' St Teresa writes—and her advice is still applicable—'she should not be accepted at any price. In general, people like this always think they know better than the wisest what is good for them. To my mind the disease is incurable, and it is nearly always accompanied by malice. In convents where there are many nuns it could be tolerated, but where there are so few it is impossible'.¹

As with neurosis, it is not so easy to track down deviations from the norm. 'Lack of commonsense,' St. Teresa continues, 'is not immediately perceptible. There are many people who talk well but understand ill. That is why it is essential to be well-informed about people before accepting them and to submit them to a long period of testing before admitting them to profession.'²

It quite often happens that a nun goes through several years of religious life before anyone notices that she is slightly lacking in judgment. Then perhaps one of the officials working with her will see it. When it is slight and accompanied by humility the thing can be borne, provided that the nun is not entrusted with any important office, because if she is, with the best will in the world she will do the most unfortunate things.

A certain degree of purely natural ability—More, however, is required for a real vocation to the contemplative life, than mere commonsense : there must be a certain natural ability. 'Since it is in fact an exceptional way of life, the contemplative life requires of those who believe themselves called to it qualities entitling them to be classed as above average, even in the natural order ; their minds and wills need to be highly developed. While possessing a fundamentally balanced temperament, from the physical as from the moral point of view, they must yet in some way be outstanding.'

¹ *Way of Perfection*, c. 14 ; Peers ii. 57.

² *Ibid*, Peers. ii. 58.

What is required is not that all the nuns should have the same qualities but that each should possess some gift or talent enabling her to escape from mediocrity. The harmony of the common life will arise from these diverse gifts. 'What would become of our little house,' St Teresa asks, 'if every nun were bent on burying the little wit she has? She ought humbly to show what she has, for the recreation of the others.'

An enclosed community cannot remain open-minded and alive unless it represents a fairly high level of intellectual and artistic cultivation as well as of moral worth. A certain homogeneity in the field of education is also necessary. This does not imply a lapse into caste prejudices. It is acknowledged that a good education is an enormous help in putting up with other people and an aid to the practice of charity.

If these natural gifts are required in order that the convent should have within itself the resources it needs, they are still more entitled to the creditable performance of the contemplative's special function with regard to the service of God. The Carmelite constitutions provide that only those 'capable of reciting the divine office' shall be accepted for the choir. The regulation should be understood in the strictest sense. 'In order that the community may be kept up to a proper level, it is essential that no 'nunnish' person should be admitted, no-one immersed in routine or given to trifling devotions. People like that get lost in vocal prayers which they recite every day and cannot do without, instead of feeding on holy scripture and the wonderful prayers provided by the liturgy. We have had postulants at Carmel who went on saying their morning and night prayers out of little books of devotion without paying the slightest attention to the offices of prime and compline which they recited in choir.'

No doubt the qualities required will be greater still in Benedictine houses where great stores of understanding and taste have to be drawn upon to ensure perfect recitation of the divine office, or in forms of life like that of the second order of St Dominic, where the intellectual side counts for so much.

Where are the ideal postulants to be found? It is obvious to everyone that they are not to be had for the asking. Hence, in practice, recruiting for convents is considered in one of two ways: some superiors put their faith in numbers and tend to

accept as many applicants as possible, with the thought that they will always be able to find a use for them somewhere, while others prefer quality, even if it means that the community will always remain small. It would doubtless be desirable to find a middle course between these two. But the quotation from Pius XI below clearly decides in favour of quality.

Another difficulty is that gifted people coming to the contemplative life have to 'possess their gifts as if they did not possess them' and realise to the full the value of the stripping process. Otherwise the contemplative's special beatitude, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' will never mean anything to them; and by crushing others less gifted but more contemplative than themselves, they may do great harm. True contemplatives know how to combine both tendencies in their spiritual lives. No-one could be more attentive to the task of the moment, or in closer touch with the realities of this world, and at the same time no-one could be more detached, for they hold all these things as nothing.

In the end it is for the superiors to decide, after carefully examining the postulant whether she shows sufficient signs of equilibrium and sound judgment and possesses the qualities that will enable her to lead the contemplative life. Let us now consider this examination.

III. THE EXAMINATION OF THE POSTULANT

The examination of the postulant by the competent authority is extremely important. In many convents the prioress and the novice mistress, not content with their own study of the postulant, introduce her to the council as well, so as to have the opinion of their more experienced nuns. In the replies to the enquiry, stress is laid on the fact that the 'history of a vocation throws a certain amount of light on the circumstances which gave it birth, the difficulties the person has met with, the way she regards it, the attraction it exerts on her or the reluctance she feels to embrace it'. The postulant will therefore be made to tell the story of her vocation. 'To my mind careful examination of the starting-point, the initial germ of a vocation is the principal, if not the exclusive means of obtaining adequate evidence of the presence or absence of vocation.'

St Benedict also provides that the senior chosen to examine the novice should make a very close and careful study of his case : 'Super eum *omnino curiose* intendat et sollicitus sit'.¹ That *omnino curiose* is the striking thing in the sentence. It shows us that we should not be afraid of questioning postulants about their lives, antecedents, tastes or everything else that seems relevant, always provided that we avoid giving the impression that we are conducting a methodical investigation, for that would be fatal to communicativeness.

The greatest importance should be attached to frankness on the postulant's part when she makes her answers. One prioress points out that simplicity is a good omen of fitness for the contemplative life : 'absence of calculation, duplicity, indirectness, complexity, unstraightforwardness, exaggeration and, as far as externals are concerned, lack of affectation and mannerisms'. It quite often happens that at the very first interview a single studied phrase or a word that does not ring true plainly reveals a lack of the indispensable straightforwardness.

A convenient method of investigation consists in asking postulants about their reading and noting their impressions. Assiduous reading of mystical writers is not always a good sign, especially in the very young. Those high-flying people, always in search of the extraordinary, who out of curiosity soak themselves in all the great mystics indiscriminately, are not to be trusted. Very often their judgment has become warped. On the contrary, love of the scriptures, and especially of the gospels, is of sterling quality. 'Contemplatives take to scripture without any difficulty and can content themselves with it better than others.'

It remains true that very little reliance can be placed on the impression made by these first conversations. 'Very often a postulant proves to be a different person in the enclosure from what she seemed in an hour's conversation at the grille, and prolonged contact leaves room for plenty of surprises.' 'Of course, in the parlour postulants always show the strongest desire for virtue in its highest form ; they are afraid of nothing.'

People who make fine speeches are not worthy of much trust

¹ *Regula*, c. 58. 'And let a senior, such as has the skill of winning souls, be appointed to watch carefully over him, to discover whether he truly seeks God . . .' English translation of the Rule by Abbot Gasquet.

because 'when someone believes he has heard God calling him, he believes it with unshakable conviction but speaks of it with the greatest reserve. If he admits it at all, it is with modesty.'

Real contemplatives are often unable to express themselves as well as other people. 'One postulant, who had exceptional gifts of contemplation, put me off at the first interview in the parlour by her really childish simplicity. I had no idea that I was dealing with an outstanding and cultivated mind. I said to her: "Ask me anything you like—what Carmelites do, what their timetable is, etc." . . . "Oh, it doesn't matter," she answered, "I'll follow the others. There's only one thing I'm afraid of, and that is that I shall be incapable of doing even that".'

Besides, all the human prudence in the world will not go very far when it comes to appraising a vocation to the contemplative life. In the last resort, only a person living the life of prayer will be able to estimate the spiritual capacities of people referred to him. And it is worth while recalling how often the judgments of the saints, made with the aid of special light from God, have been in opposition to those of the learned men of their time. Among others there is this example, borrowed from the life of Madame Acarie. 'As the nuns from Spain had no more knowledge of French than the French postulants had of Spanish, the examination of these postulants necessarily fell to the three superiors appointed by Clement VIII's bull. The superiors would never make any decision in the matter without consulting Madame Acarie, whose opinion they considered was always extremely judicious, principally because of the special vocation they saw she had for establishing this Order and the gift of discernment of spirits which she possessed to a very eminent degree. I remember that about this time there was talk of two girls who were asking to be admitted as postulants. One of them thought the religious life would be very difficult and was full of anxiety and seemed very imperfect, so that they preferred one of her fellow-postulants, who saw no difficulty in the religious life and seemed to have a great aptitude for it. Madame Acarie gave this opinion, which I thought worth setting down here. "The second one," she said, "has reached the degree of perfection that God wants her to have and she will make no further progress (she was speaking, of course, of the inner life and not of sanctifying grace, in

which, of course, according to scripture, people of goodwill go on increasing until the day of their death); but the other, to whom she is preferred, will rise much higher, because, not yet being at the goal God intends her to reach, she will come to it by continually falling and rising again in a more perfect state than she was before." She added that "God moulds the soul and handles it in such a way that often a fall becomes an occasion of progress for it." . . . "When I say that this girl sins or falls, I do not mean that she commits grievous sins; I am thinking of those internal faults like hastiness, impatience, wandering of the mind, scruples and other things which often enough raise the soul to a high degree of perfection when once they have been recognised".¹

IV. THE TESTING OF THE VOCATION OUTSIDE THE CLOISTER

In all ages the candidate for the monastic life has had to undergo certain tests before being accepted.

St Pachomius² says that when the candidate presents himself at the door of the monastery he will not be allowed in straight away but will be kept waiting for a few days at the door. Cassian fixes the period of waiting at ten days. St Benedict adopts the provision in his Rule, 'When someone comes to conversion³ *he shall not at once be admitted as a matter of course*; but as the apostle says, "Prove the spirits, whether they be of God". So if he perseveres in his request for admission and after four or five days seems to be patiently bearing the discourtesy shown him and the difficulty about entering, and to be persisting in his desire, his petition shall be granted, he shall be allowed to come in and stay in the guesthouse for a few days.'⁴

These elementary precautions were obviously necessary. And history has shown over and over again how lack of severity in admitting postulants has soon led to decadence in the monastic orders. The order of Cîteaux, for instance, less than a century after St Bernard, seems to have had a good deal to suffer from

¹ André Duval: *La vie admirable de la Bienheureuse Marie de l'Incarnation*, 1893, p. 147.

² Reg. 49.

³ i.e. to the monastic life.

⁴ Rule, c. 58.

the influx of vocations due to the attraction exercised by the saint, but which had been insufficiently sifted and tested by superiors.

If the worst comes to the worst, in an active or missionary congregation a use can always be found for difficult people. But what can be done with them in an enclosed community, which is a sort of vacuum where the slightest shock has repercussions in the souls of all the members? It is 'extremely harmful and painful for the individual himself and for the community that has accepted him. Those who drag along without fervour or vitality are a dead weight pulling at the life of the whole community.' In cases like this recreations can become a nightmare. Everybody has to keep watch over his tongue, as the slightest word may provoke an explosion; superiors themselves cannot always be perfectly open if they are to avoid scenes or stormy requests for explanations. Such an atmosphere of distrust and repression is harmful to the contemplative life, which needs broadmindedness, peace and joy if it is to develop properly.

It is thus impossible to take too many precautions when testing the spiritual temper of those who present themselves for admission. The obstacle to fight against here is a certain lack of disinterestedness, the desire to corner all comers, especially if they possess qualities or gifts which the community thinks it can turn to its own advantage. There is a temptation to say: 'the testing can be done in the noviciate. If we take them now we can see about that afterwards.' It is true that a just estimate of a postulant's worth cannot be reached except through the test constituted by the noviciate and the first years of religious life. But this test ought never to be imposed unless there is reasonable hope of success. Apart from the fact that it is always dangerous to introduce an unreliable person into a community, it is also true that people need to be protected against themselves. So often people come out of religious houses entirely broken by what they have been through, especially when it is a women's house, for there both sides are inclined to push the experiment to extremes. All they have left is a hankering after the life they have half understood and a burning desire to try again somewhere else, cost what it may. So they go on trying, making effort after effort and coming out a bit more unbalanced every time.

Would it not be a good idea to start estimating the worth and powers of perseverance of those who seek admission by following their conduct in the world for a time ? Can they stop themselves from being swamped by secular preoccupations and work ? Do they manage to pray and go to communion in spite of difficult surroundings ? Are they doing something with their lives, making their mark in the world ? To take people with some experience of the world is to make use of the results of the preliminary selection effected by ordinary secular life. One person will give in at the first sign of difficulty, another will hold out and persevere. It is often impossible to tell why. Time is a valuable factor in the diagnosis ; it should be taken into account when considering the growth of a vocation.

A common objection is that the young are more pliable and easier to mould, while those who come to the monastery later in life are apt to prove unyielding. But the ease with which a person can be moulded is not necessarily a proof of the reality of his vocation. The more talented and gifted will always put up a better 'defence' but if they do give in little by little they will be an extremely valuable acquisition.

It seems then that the proper course to pursue will be, where possible, to subject a contemplative vocation to testing in the world by asking young postulants to continue their education, e.g. by sitting certain examinations. This will enable them to acquire a stock of experience and ideas which will be very useful to them later on.

'This search for 'quality' in postulants was laid as an obligation on the heads of religious congregations by Pope Pius XI in an audience given to the Capuchin general chapter after the election of the Very Reverend Father Donatus de Wello as Minister General. The more significant passages of these 'marching orders' may perhaps be quoted :

This recommendation, for which we take full responsibility, ought to be regarded as a father's instruction to his children, based simply on a desire for the well-being of all religious families. And the instruction is this : *Be severe*. These may be hard words but they are prompted by love, for true love, love worthy of our Lord's friends, can be satisfied with nothing short of the truth . . . we are not alluding

merely to severity of discipline in general, but first and foremost to the severity which ought to be shown in accepting postulants. If anyone tells you that there is too much severity even now, we authorise you to reply that the Pope wants it to be that way, because he clearly sees the need of it, in virtue of his position and responsibilities, the more so as Providence has granted him a pontificate of some length and thus allowed him to acquire wide experience in this field. Indeed, if the religious life is to be kept in all its splendour there must be severity, particularly with regard to vocations, because although divine grace helps nature it does not destroy it ; the necessity for doing battle remains, and in the religious life the stakes are higher. For that reason care must be taken to ward off the danger caused by infiltration into a religious family of elements that might bring confusion into it, the more so as these useless acquisitions will serve no good purpose but will be an obstacle, a stumbling-block and a source of deterioration.

It is no exaggeration to say that whenever people unite to form a group, even in small numbers, deterioration occurs. We learn this from experience. This does not mean that a religious family ought therefore to reduce the number of its members ; quite the contrary—the tendency should always be towards increase. But it should see that its members are carefully chosen, like picked soldiers. This is a difficult task, but essential. When a number of men join together in some enterprise their good qualities, and particularly the highest ones, do not become common property ; each man keeps his own. Their weakness and bad qualities, on the other hand, add up and merge together . . .

If religious superiors bore this instruction in mind, coming as it does from so high an authority, it would prompt them to subject any vocation submitted to them to serious testing before following its development in the enclosure at closer range after the postulant's admission to the community.

V. THE TESTING OF THE VOCATION INSIDE THE ENCLOSURE

In matters of vocation moral certitude is reached progressively. However certain the outcome may seem at the beginning, it will

be decided only by the trial made of the vocation in the enclosure. And this trial will be made in several stages.

The characteristic thing about this choice is that the more conscious it becomes the deeper it goes. This is reflected in the Rule of St Benedict. During the year's noviciate the power of choice has to be brought to bear on the Rule three times, each time with greater knowledge of the Rule. Two months after his entry the novice has the Rule read over to him from end to end and he is told, 'This is the law under which you want to live as a soldier of God. If you can observe it, come into the community ; if not, you are free to go away.' Six months later there is another reading 'to let him know what he is entering upon', then another four months after that.¹

It is thus through contact with the monastic life and in the light of the Rule that a religious vocation finally comes to maturity. Several of the replies to the enquiry very properly bring out this experimental character of religious vocation. 'In practice, the way we tell in this convent whether a person has a contemplative vocation or not is to see whether or not she adapts herself to our life as it is here and now.'

The ultimate criterion will be what is rather vaguely called *expansiveness*. 'During the noviciate we try to see if the novices are fitting in with the family spirit and showing by a physical and moral expansiveness that they have found the proper soil to take root in, where their spiritual life can develop. All this is done not by any specific means but with that natural simplicity found in Christian families, where the parents act much more by their example and by the warm and peaceful atmosphere of love than by the studied application of principles.'

The expansiveness in question is quite compatible with temptation and dislike for the life, even if the temptation and dislike are very strong. But it is still perceptible in the midst of these trials ; it takes the form of a sort of joy hidden in the depths of the personality, a conviction of being in the right place in spite of everything.

Proof of it is sometimes furnished by an increase in physical stability. Thus a girl may be in a low state of health when she goes into the convent, but with a superior intelligent enough to

¹ *Regula*, c. 58.

let her get used to the monastic way of life little by little and not drive her too hard at first, she will recover her physical balance, if she is in her right place. Merriment—not the exuberance engendered by too much nervous tension but a frank and deep-seated gaiety—is a good sign. So is sleep. ‘It is no small blessing that you sleep well,’ St Teresa says. Above all, there should be openness, pliability and docility in the person’s attitude. The enigmatic, the much-repressed, arouse the gravest fears, even after years of religious life.

Some people find their balance almost from the start and in such a way as to leave no room for doubt. Others cause much anxiety and their vocation may go on developing for years with many fluctuations. As we have already said, it takes at least three or four years before full conviction can be reached.

In cases where doubt persists, there should be no hesitation in prolonging the noviciate or the period of simple vows as far as the law allows. ‘Our holy mother St Teresa would have liked novices to go ten years before making their vows. Ten years without vows is a long time ; to my mind it would be desirable if holy Church would prolong the time spent under temporary vows. Four or five years are not enough for passing judgment on a contemplative vocation. So many poor people take up a kind of life that is too heavy for them and slow down the pace of their community, whereas somewhere else, in a less difficult kind of life, they might have produced a better harvest for the glory of God.’

CONCLUSION

The call from God, the qualities required in the individual, the serious testing of the vocation—these are the essence of the replies to our enquiry. If, as was to be expected, they provide no entirely new means of determining the signs of contemplative vocation, they do draw attention to the way in which the traditional criteria ought to be interpreted in our time.

Moreover, recognising and fostering vocations is not like giving guidance about the choice of a profession ; it cannot be done on general lines. It can be taken as a fact that if the director is not a man of prayer, even though in other respects he may be the best possible psychologist, he will do a great deal of harm in this field.

For though they must use all the means of investigation in their power, in the last resort only those who pray will be capable of discovering and guiding those who pray.

And again, as in other fields, once the principles have been laid down there will always here and there be a *felix culpa* corresponding to the secret designs of God. Reason would say that such and such a person ought never to have belonged to such and such a religious order, and yet he renders it real service and sanctifies himself in it. 'The Spirit blows where he wills,' as St Teresa of the Child Jesus was fond of saying.

CHAPTER V

AN ENQUIRY ABOUT VOCATION

The following pages represent the conclusions reached by a priest after an enquiry conducted among religious of his acquaintance, and the replies sent in by three active congregations to a similar enquiry. It would have been tedious to publish more details, because of the many inevitable repetitions. What is given below will be sufficient to give a general idea of the situation.

THE TEXT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

I. What signs (regarding her desires and dispositions) do you look for in order to tell whether a postulant has a vocation *to your institute* ?

II. (1) Do many people leave during their postulancy, their noviciate, the period spent under simple vows, or after solemn profession ?

(2) To what causes do you attribute these departures ?

(3) Do you think they could have been detected before the person entered, and if so, how ?

(4) If the training had been better adapted to the needs of the case, could it have neutralised the factors responsible for departure ? Has there not sometimes been a certain clumsiness of treatment in the noviciate, which has kept these things alive and even aggravated them ?

III. (1) Are there any professed nuns remaining in the religious life but causing such anxiety and disappointment that the community comes to wish it had not admitted them to profession ?

(2) What are the commonest disappointments ?

(3) What causes them ? Could the causes have been detected in time ? Could they have been remedied during the training period ?

IV. (1) Do priests sometimes fail in discrimination and send you girls who seem to you to have no vocation ?

(2) What are the commonest mistakes made by priests in the matter ?

(3) What are the principles you would like to see them following ?

THE DAUGHTERS OF ST FRANCIS

At the present moment there are about fifty Franciscan congregations and fifty-five convents of Poor Clares in France.

It would scarcely have been possible for me to get into touch with more than a quarter of these without considerable difficulty. In fact, I consulted no more than a fifth, i.e. about twenty, and I received fifteen replies.

QUESTION ONE

The replies make hardly any distinction between the postulant's ideals and her possession of the suitable qualities. In practice, little store seems to be set by the latter. The sisters make sure that her family is respectable, that she has not been leading an irresponsible life, that her health and character and sometimes her judgment are sound ; but that is all.

Perhaps the necessity of making enquiries about the postulant's fitness for the particular institute was considered to be so obvious that it seemed superfluous to stress it in the replies.

On the other hand, the idea may have been that as the qualities in question are rightly called 'social', they will reveal themselves, if they exist, in the society constituted by the religious community ; that the postulancy and noviciate were instituted for that purpose and hence that there is no need to worry about the matter before the postulant enters.

Yet, great stress is laid, and rightly so, on the determination to make an unreserved gift of self to God by striving to be like Christ and live in union with him for the good of souls. One of the things that active congregations want most is that their members be devoted to whatever form of apostolic work may come their way, and at the same time that they lead an intensely spiritual life—so much so that some of them are not afraid of talking about contemplation in this connection. 'The signs of vocation to our life are :

'Zeal for souls and a taste for contemplation, with a clear realisation that taste for contemplation is the basis of zeal for souls ;

'Singleness of purpose and absence of preoccupation with self and self-interest.'

In addition to this nearly all the replies require marked leanings towards spiritual poverty, simplicity of life, devotion to the poor, the humble and the outcast . . .

For the Poor Clares the matter seems very simple :

‘When a girl asks to be admitted we give her a clear account of our way of life with its basis of simplicity as recommended in the gospels, trusting co-operation with divine providence and separation from all that is human through spiritual poverty ; a life of prayer, obscurity and faith, a family life after the spirit of our seraphic Father.

‘If the aspirant tells us she is attracted by the idea of following this path (the nature of which she dimly apprehends, but understands imperfectly as yet), and assures us that she wants a hidden apostolate in obscurity and detachment from self and things that pass, we give her credit for her good will and point out to her the obstacles and difficulties and also the joys she may meet with.’

We have noticed that ‘the young of to-day take enthusiastically to the simplicity and detachment of Franciscan life, challenging as it does the pleasure-seeking world with its greed for money and standing as a perpetual miracle wrought by the kind providence that rewards with maternal attentions the trust we place in it.’

QUESTION TWO

This method of procedure does not give such bad results, since in this convent, out of eleven persons admitted to the postulancy in ten years, there was only one who left, and that because of ill-health. The Mother Abbess adds that ‘the community has never regretted taking anybody.

‘If we had any regrets, they would be on the score of health . . . But the fact that the sisters are making progress in holiness shows that this enters into God’s plan for us.’

The situation is not, however, the same in all the convents. One of them acknowledges that fifteen of the thirty-nine people admitted in seventeen years went away again ; another states that only one aspirant in three has enough generosity to embark on the postulancy. But in general, those who do enter persevere to the end. The few recorded cases of departure later on are nearly always officially put down to ill-health, but this lack of health

often goes with some moral weakness—scruples, melancholia, self-centredness or a more sentimental than supernatural desire for the cloistered life.

The proportion of people leaving active congregations varies between a half and a fifth. Missionary congregations seem to have fewer trials in this respect. In all congregations, people leave mostly during the postulancy or during the noviciate. There are few departures after the first profession, fewer still after the perpetual.

What are the usual reasons why people come out ?

Before profession they generally leave on account of ill-health ; more than half do so. But here, too, it is likely that this reason often hides others—usually lack of the spirit of renunciation, which in turn implies a basic lack of education in the will.

There is also failure to understand the religious life. This operates in the case of those who enter in order to improve their prospects, finding a place where they can put their qualifications to good use.

And there are those who leave because they miss the life they were used to in their families.

After profession the motives for leaving are more often lack of nervous or mental balance, want of the spirit of faith or absence of generosity.

Among the rare cases where nuns leave after perpetual vows, I note as causes mental instability and inconstancy, faults of character, which in spite of all hopes prove impossible to correct, lack of affective detachment and infidelity to prayer.

A more fundamental reason why people leave after profession is that even in reputedly Christian families life is not now based on faith as much as it used to be.

Girls with every sign of a really sound vocation do in fact get as far as profession without always having a very clear idea of the dignity of the vows or the gravity of the obligations they give rise to. The fact that profession has something sacred and definitive about it escapes them. They regard it as nothing more than a ceremony. This attitude is surely produced by the same mentality as that responsible for divorce and for lack of respect for the pledged word.

There seems no doubt that many of these factors responsible

for departure could have been discovered in time. Several means are recommended to this end. The young aspirant might stay for a few months in one of the houses of the congregation, she might make a closed retreat under the guidance of a religious in one of these houses, or it might be possible to follow her career in the world for a few years.

There is no doubt that other factors leading people to leave can be discovered only while the religious life is being tried out in the postulancy or noviciate. Some do not even come to light until much later, after final profession—which is why nearly every congregation has people it wishes it had not admitted.

QUESTION THREE

There are not many, but cases do exist . . . These 'difficult' nuns generally come to grief over obedience, which weighs too heavily on them ; they are unfaithful to the Rule and their relations with their superiors become strained. They find it difficult to bear with their sisters and they make no pretence at trying ; hence they want to be rid of their associates by changing their occupations or place of residence. They are under the illusion that they could do more good in the world or in another congregation, and so they are discontented with everything.

Behind all this there is very often lack of balance and therefore lack of judgment, as well as disappointed pride, which produces a certain bitterness. There may also be frequent infidelity to grace and perhaps in some cases lack of real vocation.

If postulants had been the object of more careful study, some of these difficult cases might have been avoided, especially as they occur with people who were accepted in the end only with hesitation or even out of charity.

QUESTION FOUR

As for the fourth question, all the replies received agree in saying that priests do not send many postulants and that when they do, they do not always (nor even often) show discrimination about it.

These are the mistakes with which they are reproached :

1. They have no real knowledge of the girls they send. They see them at work in charitable organisations, i.e. in their contacts

with the outside world, but often they have not the slightest idea of the attitude and disposition they reveal when they are at home with their families, whereas it is chiefly in their family life that people show themselves for what they are.

Moreover, they are too ready to believe what they are told. 'Some girls are very good at talking to their directors about their souls ; others are better still at writing about them.'

2. They do not take heredity and family environment sufficiently into account.

3. They do not rate the religious life high enough. The grievances on this score are serious :

(a) Some priests actually try to persuade people that the religious life is out of date and that they could do at least as much good by staying in the world ;

(b) Others keep girls back to work in their parochial organisations or in Catholic Action, and by the time they let them go the grace of vocation has been lost. They do not realise clearly enough that vocation is an *actual* grace.

(c) Many forget that if they agree that a girl has a vocation, they ought to give her support and encouragement, the more so as the vocation is often strenuously opposed by the family. For the family is quite willing that the son should become a priest, but does not take to the idea of the daughter becoming a nun. Priests are even found aiding and abetting families in the matter.

(d) In the same way, many priests have erroneous ideas about religious obedience. They do not realise how different it is from the obedience required of a priest. They do not sufficiently realise that if obedience is necessary for priests chiefly in view of their efficiency in the apostolate, in the religious life and particularly in women's communities, it is above all a vocation to self-sacrifice, not to teaching or any other social service.

(e) On the whole 'they are not perhaps sufficiently aware that a vocation ought to be able to stand up for itself.

'When some of them come across girls who fancy they have vocations, they cultivate them like hothouse plants and then show them off as choice specimens ; whereas they ought to subject them to a sterner climate, as like as may be to the one they will find in the convent.'

As for the principles which, according to the replies, should be

applied by priests in ascertaining a vocation, they may be summarised as follows :

1. Because profession is above all the giving of the self to Christ, priests should test the aspirant's desire for the religious life to see if it is disinterested. This they can do by making sure that the motives of it are supernatural and the foundation of it the ascendancy of Christ over the soul. It will also help if they point out in no uncertain terms that in the religious life there is more to be lost than gained, in the sense in which the words of the gospel, 'He that shall lose his life for me shall find it,' are meant (Matt. 10, 39).
2. They should put the aspirant's piety to the test by encouraging her to develop a taste for prayer and a liking for the spirit of prayer.
3. They should see how sincere she is about self-denial by noting how she practises the ordinary Christian virtues in her life at home and by training her to lead a progressively more disciplined existence.

'We think the priests called upon to give an opinion about vocations ought to realise more clearly that life in the twentieth century is still founded on the principle of renunciation. "If any man will come after me . . ." (Matt. 16, 24). The gospels are valid in every age.

'Above all they should make sure that these girls they are directing are actuated by a deeply supernatural spirit and have finely-tempered characters capable of renunciation in all its forms.'

REPLIES FROM THREE ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

FIRST CONGREGATION

I. The best signs of vocation seem to be open-mindedness, sound judgment, strength of will combined with ability to give way in the proper circumstances, a balanced physical constitution, a practical turn of mind and good temper.

II. The reasons why people in the various categories have left us are in the main concerned with health and unsuitability of temperament and disposition, such as instability. Lack of the

spirit of obedience accounted for only three out of a total of eighty over a period of four years.¹

Aspirants are carefully examined before they enter and again in the course of a retreat made in one of our houses. A preliminary choice is then made and the less desirable are eliminated.

Those admitted continue to be under observation during the postulancy and noviciate. Naturally the test of the religious life reveals the weak points. They now realise the demands made by life in common and have some idea whether they will be able to bear the weight of it and have the necessary self-denial. They know that while grace will never fail them they may themselves be unfaithful through want of generosity, and they can see to what extent they are prepared to respond to the call of grace.

Those responsible for the training in the noviciate during the first year are firm without being narrow or rigid. The fact that the house where the training is given is roomy and well-ventilated helps to avoid tension. The novice-mistress watches over the girls and mothers them, while a group of experienced nuns give lectures or assign jobs according to the various novices and according to individual capacities.

III. Some professed nuns do, it is true, cause anxiety and there are occasional disappointments. We try to isolate such nuns by giving them work to do on their own or by frequently changing them from one house or environment to another. They are then less of a drag on the common life.

These disappointments are generally due to a certain hardening of the character which comes with increasing age. Sufficient fight has not been put against defects which now become more apparent. They are inveterate habits impossible to get rid of now that moral strength is weakening along with physical.

Attempts may be made to stop the rot by reminding these nuns of the place which the supernatural ought to occupy in their lives, by encouraging all their efforts and by stirring up in them new zeal for the apostolate. It is very often possible to revive their fervour. Their surroundings can exert a good influence on them, as we know, happily, from experience.

¹ This reply included a table giving these statistics in detail. It has seemed sufficient to summarise the statistics in this way for the English Edition.
—Editor.

When novices do not prove entirely satisfactory in the first year noviciate, they may, and even should, be tried out further in the second year noviciate.

The active missionary life led in the second year sometimes succeeds in resolving the tension. Novices pull themselves together, become more mature, show initiative and may become real apostles.

IV. In general, directors are thoughtful and prudent and they act from supernatural motives. Some of them prepare postulants so well that success is almost certain. Others do not as yet see the way to train the young in self-denial, obedience and detachment from themselves and their families, but little by little they will learn from experience.

Vocation remains a mystery even to the wisest directors. Some novices succeed even though their decision to enter seemed daring in the extreme. Others do not stay the course, although they seemed as sound as it is possible to be.

Some nuns occasionally show signs of nervous depression or even of evident mental disorder. They should be treated by experienced doctors. We have had various cases of the kind and the outcome has always been most consoling. The persons in question were sent to relax with their families or they received treatment in a home, after which they were able to come back to us and take up the ordinary religious life again with the greatest of ease.

When one of them came out of the mental home she asked to be allowed to go into a home for ladies but to come and die in her own community. When she was very ill she was brought back to one of our rest-houses and died there like a saint, delighted at the thought that she was setting out for heaven from the religious family to which she belonged.

If there are one or two slightly abnormal nuns we try to put them with understanding people. The superior leaves them all the latitude desirable or necessary and the other sisters are not surprised if they sometimes act a little strangely. In this way these sick persons can go on sanctifying themselves. The majority of mental disorders prove to be hereditary, though only discovered subsequently and unknown to those concerned.

SECOND CONGREGATION

I. *What should postulants be attracted by?*—First and foremost they should desire two things: to lead an inner life in the closest intimacy with God and to give themselves to souls. It is a twofold vocation, to contemplation and to the apostolate. They should possess a love of the liturgical life and a piety nourished on the sacred texts of the divine office.

Suitable qualities—A certain capacity for self-forgetfulness, for being so taken up by the all-absorbing interests of God, the Church and souls as to hold oneself cheap and practise that form of immolation which consists of gladly overlooking oneself. After that, we look for love of the light, the need of living according to the Truth, with straightforwardness and breadth of outlook.

II. (1) A ten years' experience in France reveals these conclusions:

It is estimated that for every four persons who enter there is one who leaves.

With every month spent in the religious life the number of people leaving grows less. Most of those who come out do so during the postulancy or at the beginning of the noviciate. Very few leave after the first vows. With three exceptions, those who did were sent away and the community has never regretted losing them, except in those cases where the dismissal was made on grounds of ill-health.

(2) The reasons why people are sent away are generally the following:

During the postulancy they are dismissed because of obviously inadequate health, absence of vocation, possession of faults incompatible with community life or lack of generosity.

If there is any doubt about these different points the postulancy is usually prolonged and the person is given the habit. But in the great majority of cases the change of life, surroundings, spiritual direction and confessor only confirms the doubt, and the person is sent away after a few months in the noviciate.

The few cases of dismissal before profession occurred because health or mental balance had been sorely tried during these two and a half years, or because of a complexus of mediocrity and difficulties, none of which would have been decisive by

themselves, but which failed to yield in the way anticipated to the training given in the noviciate.

Family affairs (e.g. the death of a near relation) making it necessary for the novice to return to her family, should perhaps be considered as another reason for leaving. In practice I know of only one such case in this period, and that was one where the vocation was not very firmly established. (I know nothing about the reasons why people have left after profession.)

(3) In most cases some idea of the obstacle was formed from the information obtained about the person before she entered. When failure seems almost certain the applicant is not accepted. But when there is doubt it seems right that the matter should be put to the test.

In cases of ill-health or lack of balance there is often a surprise in store. Slightly unsteady people are sometimes amazingly strengthened by the regularity of the life and the assurance they gain through a life in harmony with their vocation.

Reliable signs of lack of generosity are furnished by the postulant's previous life, but here again there may be surprises, pleasant or unpleasant.

Other qualities unfitting people for the religious life are hard to discover. It takes time and experience to bring them to light.

However that may be, it is unquestionable that in the great majority of dubious cases, the people concerned do not succeed, and that it is desirable to be severe about admitting postulants.

(4) It is beyond all doubt that the noviciate reveals hidden weaknesses and discloses latent defects. But the question is whether these deficiencies will still be there later on and spoil the whole of the person's religious life.

I think that when a noviciate is not too big the training really is varied to suit individual needs, and that novices realise that the aim of the noviciate is to help them to learn what their vocation means and not to drain away their life blood.

Yet it remains true that for some temperaments these two years of testing are also years of combat difficult for them to bear. But another part of the training, especially in the second year, gives them the necessary relaxation.

III. It does happen, but where the secular clergy are concerned the opposite is more often the case—a real vocation is not

encouraged or is even diverted from the religious life.

In general, priests hardly ever consider anything else in this connection except spiritual questions ; they pay too little attention to the context of health, age, antecedents and character. It is enough for them that the soul of the person concerned will derive benefit from it ; they do not consider the consequences to the congregation of accepting a mediocre person who will be a drag on the life of any community. It would be well if they had the common good more in mind and not simply the interests of the individual.

A fault of another kind is that many priests fail to realise the grandeur and fertility of the religious life and give the young people they direct a false idea of it.

THIRD CONGREGATION

I. Desire for an apostolic life upheld by sound inner life—which implies a certain level in both the supernatural and the natural order from the outset.

As the congregation has no lay sisters and is turning more and more towards the mixed life, it gives all its religious a good grounding in spirituality, whatever work may subsequently be assigned to them. Together with the life of prayer and apostolic work, they are expected to have a love for the liturgical life and hence the capacity to appreciate the text of the mass and office in such a way as to draw profit from them.

As the end of the congregation is a general one, this desire for an apostolic life must not be too closely linked with any given activity, for our aim is to be at the Church's disposal by adapting ourselves to the various needs of the hour in so far as they come within the framework of the activities pursued by the congregation.

Girls wanting to enter the congregation are also expected to realise the meaning of simplicity, frankness and disinterestedness, or at least make every effort to understand the kind of spirit that will make them pliable and docile in the hands of their superiors and really like sisters to the other nuns, while at the same time they will be capable of engaging in the apostolate in such a way as to leave all the glory of it to God.

Their health must be at least adequate as well, and they need

enough psychological balance to bear the strain inevitable in the religious life.

II. (1) Statistics covering a period of fourteen years show a loss of about a quarter of those entering, the biggest percentage bearing, of course, on the postulants and novices.

(2) Postulancy and Novitiate. Weakness of health is unfortunately a fairly frequent cause of failure in the present post-war period.

Lack of balance, too, may in part be due to the same cause. It affects some of the more sensitive temperaments, which are liable to be attacked by scruples and affective disturbances; it soon creates disorder in the soul, which then sinks into a morass of discouragement. The question of perseverance then very soon arises. We may note also a few cases of hysteria, which seldom shows itself through the usual fits but rather takes the form of an unhealthy need to be the centre of attention and comes out in an endless succession of illnesses hard to diagnose.

Difficulty of adaptation is often a stumbling-block. Some people constantly make false judgments concerning customs and gestures which are in fact justified by experience, but which they put down to narrowness. Stopping short at externals, they become spiritually tired and discouraged.

Love will later make them outgrow these impressions, but at this critical period it is a matter of duty for the novice-mistress to feel a supernatural concern for them, and stoop to their level in order to understand them better and make them see that the motive force of it all is charity, which is the essence of the religious life. It must also be said, with all due respect, that occasionally the confessor takes sides with a young religious when all that is wrong, perhaps, is that she is subconsciously giving way to the need to draw attention to herself. He sometimes approves of unfortunate attitudes and thus unwittingly sets novices at loggerheads with their superiors, whereas it would be desirable for him to set before them a more supernatural outlook and the love of God as a means of overcoming all the difficulties inherent in the spiritual life at the beginning.

It is noticeable that some people go through a period of fatigue during the novitiate. The great burst of ardour that raised the soul up in the beginning gives place to a time of difficulty. The feelings, for instance, which at first played their part in

sustaining the soul's early efforts at prayer are little by little eliminated from the spiritual sphere, leaving the person struggling on the human level ; natural inclinations try to revive, the heart claims its rights, boredom slips into the monotonous days of cloistered life and discouragement finds its way in as imperfections seem to spring up again.

Obviously people like this need helping and the congregation does not ask them to withdraw—on some pretext suggested by charity—unless there is no other solution, i.e. in cases of ill-health, lack of balance or lack of submission to obedience and community life.

Temporary vows.—Nuns in temporary vows are exposed to two main dangers : some plunge headlong into active work at the expense of their spiritual exercises, others are terrified of losing their inner life through activity. The result in the one case is mediocrity, which takes possession of the whole life and sooner or later ruins it, and in the other discouragement. Local superiors have a part of prime importance to play here. They ought to continue the noviciate training by striving to bring fervour and balance to those just setting out on the road to perfection. Otherwise it may all end in loss of vocation.

Recent converts from schismatic churches, judaism, indifference or ignorance of religion have great difficulty in persevering. It is very important that they should have constant help in the early years of their religious life, as the slightest obstacle throws them off their balance.

Perpetual vows.—When nuns in perpetual vows forsake their vocation they are yielding to pride or an evil desire for the world. There are racial difficulties, too. Our missions in the east have given us some vocations among the Slavs and it must be admitted that here we are faced with temperamental instability. These people are away from their own country and deprived by circumstances of all contact with their families, and when temptations come they have little will-power to resist.

Difficulties arising from the activities carried on by the nuns should also be mentioned, in particular those caused by nursing homes, where the religious come into contact with a rich and fashionable set of women.

(3) Yes, some could.

It would seem necessary to take a girl's family, past and temperament carefully into consideration before advising her to think about the religious life. With regard to the family, very careful consideration is needed before sending an only child into a convent. She has duties to fulfil. If the parents have no objection there is nothing to worry about, but if they are opposed to the step or if their financial situation is such that they will one day be in want, there is room for thought.

It would seem, too, that people should not be accepted if they come from too low a class, with an evident lack of education in family and social life, and with vulgar habits, for though these may apparently be corrected by the noviciate, they are never long in coming back. Community life has so much to suffer from people like these, that care in this respect is essential.

We may repeat in this connection that a certain amount of caution is needed with regard to converts, whether they are of Slavonic extraction or whether they have been born in a Christian country but have come to the Catholic faith later in life. These should in fact be given a suitable time for preparation before being admitted to the postulancy. Otherwise they will be in danger of not persevering when difficulties arise.

(4) It could, of course, be said that if the training had been better adapted to individual needs it might have neutralised the factors responsible for departure, but this is far from being true of every case. What use would improved training be in cases where lack of balance has physical causes or results from habitual want of control? Can apostasy occurring after forty, fifty or even sixty years of religious life be attributed to faulty training?

A novice-mistress may sometimes be painfully surprised when she sees how such and such a nun had turned out after all the hopes that were placed in her on account of her intellectual qualities and pliable character. Nuns like this evidently had no self-knowledge and cannot have revealed themselves sufficiently, so that it was impossible to give them adequate warning against their defects.

It remains true that more and more intensive efforts should be made with regard to the training and its adaptation to individual needs and that a novice-mistress ought to know the right way to set about studying the girls of to-day, who are so full of promise

in spite of seeming from the outside to be undisciplined and too self-reliant. In their ignorance of themselves the young only too often mistake caprice and a false idea of obedience for the essence of personality. It is important to show them that rightly understood and practised, the religious life can enrich them enormously.

The noviciate may certainly aggravate unfortunate tendencies, but it usually does so only in the case of people who are none too well-balanced already. Others may be depressed at times, but with them it is not a lasting condition : it is just that they do not happen to be in the same mood as the novice-mistress.

III. (1) Yes, there are some nuns whom we are sorry we admitted to profession. Experience has taught us one thing, and that is that when there is a doubt about anyone in the noviciate it is nearly always confirmed later : the situation does not improve. There may be exceptions but they are few and far between.

(2) Increasing lack of balance ; ill-temper becoming unbearable ; disobedience developing into rebellion and complete independence ; the need of recovering the comforts of life, in view of the weakness of old age.

(3) First it must be said that some nuns do not take themselves sufficiently in hand, but there is matter for self-examination on the congregation's side, too. As we have said, there is the role allotted to the local superior, who sometimes neglects her chief duty, the sanctification of the souls entrusted to her—for there is not only the noviciate to consider ; nuns have a right to be watched over and helped throughout the entire course of their religious life. Consummate perfection cannot be expected of young religious just out of the noviciate. Mistakes are made on that score only too often.

One of the best means of confirming our nuns in their vocation is the 'probation' they undergo before their final profession. The motives of the novice's actions often come from without ; she accepts one after another the principles taught her but she never manages to assimilate them deeply enough to make them the mainspring of her life. It is quite otherwise with the nun undergoing probation. Enriched by the experience acquired during several years of active work, she can gather her thoughts together in the light of God's grace, and think out her religious life again for herself, concentrate on the ideal disclosed to her by the Holy

Ghost and advance with renewed courage along the road to perfection. Experience proves that the period of probation is the necessary complement of the noviciate.

IV. It does not often happen.

Priests do, however, sometimes make mistakes. Sometimes a girl may want to go into a convent to please her confessor or one of the nuns. Such cases are quite common, especially the latter. If this motive enters only partially into the decision grace usually gets the better of it, for there is no means that God cannot use for drawing souls to himself.

Sometimes priests want to snatch girls out of the world chiefly because their flightiness makes the dangers surrounding them more formidable for them than they would be for others. If this motive is accompanied by a real desire to belong to God, grace will triumph ; if not, the young nun will either fail to persevere or else settle down to an extremely mediocre sort of religious life.

Sometimes a director may advise a girl not to reveal, before she is accepted or until the years of training are over, certain outward circumstances in her past life which she has told him about. Looking at the matter simply as it affects the real interests of the soul concerned and without bringing in the interests of the congregation, it is obvious that in such conditions there is no possibility of giving that special direction which would suit individual needs and help in the struggles which people like this are more exposed to than most.

CHAPTER VI CANONICAL IMPEDIMENTS

By E. BERGH, S.J.

There is scarcely any need to point out that an explanation of this point has its place in a general study of vocation. The organisation of the religious life at every stage is controlled by the Church and her laws. The Church can therefore declare her mind about what constitutes a serious obstacle to the religious life; it is for her to exclude the undesirable and those who would be incapable of satisfying the obligations of the life, i.e. to prohibit by a positive law what would be an impediment to the religious life even on grounds of natural law. This evident principle is stated in two different places in the Code :

(a) Canon 538 says that 'any Catholic not hindered by some legitimate impediment may be admitted to religion if his motives are right and he is capable of discharging the obligations of the religious life.'

(b) Canon 542 gives a list of impediments nullifying admission to the noviciate¹ or making it illicit. It prefaces these two lists with the remark that they are given without prejudice to the regulations contained in canons 539-541² or to others provided for in the constitutions of the various institutes.³

We will now explain the two lists given in the Church's law and comment on them as we go along. We will try to understand why they exclude certain classes of people from the religious life, though it should be noted that it is often possible to obtain a dispensation and that in some cases dispensations are frequently given, even for dirriment impediments.

A. The following cannot validly be admitted into the noviciate:

(1) *Those who have belonged to a non-Catholic sect.*

¹ It should be noted that the regulations commented on below are not directly concerned either with the postulancy or with profession.

² Cc. 539-541 deal with the postulancy which, while constituting a serious obligation for some religious institutes (c. 539), is yet not imposed in such a way that failure to observe it would make the noviciate invalid.

³ For this reason a distinction is made between impediments created by the common law (those dealt with below) and impediments due to particular law, i.e. those peculiar to a given institute.

A decision on the meaning of these words has been given by the Commission of Interpretation.¹ They apply not to those born in schism or heresy but to Catholics who have apostatised and openly passed over to a schismatic, heretical or atheistic sect.² A man becoming a Freemason would not thereby incur this impediment.

It is easy to see why special distrust is necessary with regard to a person baptised as a Catholic and wanting to go into religion, if he has openly joined another confession.³ This is the ground for the impediment. The impediment does not exist in the case of a born heretic or schismatic who becomes a Catholic and thinks of going into religion.⁴ This first impediment is doubtless not often met with.

(2) *Those who have not reached the age required for the noviciate.*

In a subsequent canon (c. 555, par. 1, n. 1) the Code gives this age as fifteen. It nowhere requires minors to obtain the consent of their parents before going into religion ; it has no restrictive clause on the point, as it has in the case of marriage (c. 1034).

When the monastic life was in its beginnings, both in the east and in the west, the practice of oblation existed. Those who in their childhood had been offered or given to the monastery by their parents were bound to stay there, though they were not bound by vows unless they had made them of their own accord. The Council of Toledo in 633 bears witness to this custom when it says that what makes a man a monk is either his parents' devotion or the profession he makes himself, and that whichever of the two may obtain in a given case, the obligation contracted will be a lasting one. *Monachum aut paterna devotio aut propria professio facit ; quidquid horum fuerit, alligatum tenebit.*

From the eleventh century onwards this practice gradually disappeared. Celestine III (1191-1198) and Innocent IV (1243-1254) wanted to ensure that the oblates should have their freedom. In the end the Council of Trent (sess. XXV, c. 15)

¹ Reply of 16 Oct., 1919, A.A.S. 11 (1919), p. 477.

² Reply of the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code, 30 July, 1934, A.A.S. 26 (1934), p. 494.

³ Opinions are divided on the question as to whether people joining a non-Christian religious sect (Judaism, for example) would fall under the ban.

⁴ If it is a clerical institute, irregularity will have to be taken into account (cc. 542, par. 2 and 985. 1.).

prescribed a full year's noviciate before profession, which could not be made before the age of sixteen, though in the case of girls it provided for clothing after the age of twelve (c. 17). With regard to lay-brothers of religious orders Clement VIII required that they should have reached the age of twenty.¹

Would it be possible under the present regulations to take novices as early as fourteen if the institute is one that imposes two years of probation on its novices? Apart from cases in which an apostolic indult has been obtained, the reply to this question must be in the negative, because the canonical year of noviciate has to be the first of these two years.²

No maximum age-limit is set by the common law.³ Frequently, however, especially in women's congregations, there is a limit fixed at some age between, e.g. thirty-five and forty. This may be explained by the greater difficulty felt after that age in getting used to a new way of life, or because resistance to physical fatigue decreases at that time of life.

(3) The third impediment to valid admission to the noviciate affects *'those who go into religion under the influence of force, acute fear, or fraud, and those accepted because the superior is under the same influence when he admits them'*. The bearing of this impediment will be grasped at once: going into religion is of its nature a work of supererogation, a spontaneous thing requiring full freedom if it is to be done properly. The Church's penal law protects this freedom by excommunicating all who force people to make religious profession (c. 2352).

Three kinds of undue pressure can be distinguished:

(a) physical violence properly so-called. This, no doubt, is not often found to-day.

(b) acute fear. As always in legal questions, by fear is meant fear provoked by a free agent other than the one who suffers it. The sort of thing to be reckoned with is not fear of thunder, fear of dying in a state of sin or anything of that sort; but rather the fear a mother, for example, might provoke in her daughter to

¹ Bull *Cum ad Regularem*, 19 March, 1603.

² Cf. Reply of the Pontifical Commission, 12 Feb., 1935, A.A.S. 27 (1935), p. 92.

³ Clement VIII, *l.c.*, ordered that no candidate over twenty-five should be accepted for an order of men if he had not the intellectual attainments necessary for the priesthood. Such a man could be accepted only as a lay-brother.

make her go into a convent by bringing up a promise made long ago in time of illness. Again, unlike what obtains in the case of marriage, no distinction is made here between unjust fear and just fear.¹

(c) fraud. We may define it with a recent work² as a 'deliberately ambiguous action, done in bad faith, with the intention of doing harm and leading others to perform or modify a legal transaction. The usual effect of fraud is error, and it is under the influence of this error that the legal transaction is carried out.' Suppose, for example, that when the superior asks me about my health before I go into the noviciate, I say that I have always been perfectly healthy, whereas in fact this is not the case ; I am making a deliberately false declaration, as I foresee that if I tell the truth I shall not be accepted. The harmful effect of this false declaration is that it diminishes the superior's freedom of consent, in practice deceives him and lays on the institute a burden which it probably would not have agreed to had it known.

Fraud, on the candidate's part, may take different forms—deliberately keeping silent about defects or certain illnesses, pretending or claiming to possess qualities or degrees calculated to facilitate entry and so forth.

One difficulty peculiar to this subject is that of estimating the precise influence exercised by the false declaration on the other party's consent : if he was willing to accept the candidate even though he had bad health, it could not be said that there was fraud in concluding the legal action, and the admission of the candidate would be valid. Thus, in order to remove all possibility of a subsequent doubt as to whether a candidate has been admitted validly, it would seem desirable to warn him plainly of the importance of the questions put to him and the necessity of answering honestly, on pain of invalidating the act admitting him to the noviciate.

It may be mentioned that in the opinion of at least one canonist³ the effects of fraud on admission to the noviciate seem

¹ Such as the fear caused by the pressure exerted on a young man by the parents of the girl he has seduced, in order to get him to marry her.

² G. Fransen, *Le dol dans la conclusion des actes juridiques*, Louvain, 1946, p. 370.

³ R. Bigador, S.J., *De dolo et eius effectibus in admissione ad novitium et professione religiosa* in *Periodica de re morali*, 20 (1931), p. 71.

out of all proportion to their cause, because error caused by the fraud will usually be rectified in the course of the noviciate which exists, among other things, to enable the superior to get to know the novice better. That is true, but it may happen that the deceit will continue throughout the noviciate as well and that the noviciate will not provide an opportunity of getting to know some of the really deep-rooted faults. It is thus understandable that canon law should insist on complete honesty when the step to be taken is so personal as the act of entering a religious order.

It will have been noticed that, according to the wording of the clause dealing with this impediment, safeguards are required for perfect freedom *both* in the candidate *and* in the superiors. Both parties need protection. For it is conceivable that fraud might be committed by the superior as well if, for example, he tried to secure a very talented candidate by making deceptive promises.

When the law speaks of the full freedom required for valid profession (c. 572, par. 1, n. 4), the only pressure it contemplates is that which may eventually be exercised on the candidate, no doubt because it supposes that the candidate has ceased by then to be in a position to influence the decision of his superiors.

(4) '*No married person*' can be validly admitted to the noviciate '*as long as the marriage subsists*'.

Various motives may be suggested for this impediment—the rights acquired by the other partner, the presumption that the person will not persevere in remodelling his life along these new lines, the danger that the civil power may intervene and force the religious to go back to his wife. Under the old canon law one partner had the right to go into religion without the consent of the other. Similarly, within the two months following the celebration of the marriage, if the marriage had not been consummated one of the partners could enter a noviciate even without the other's consent. But the new Code allows no exceptions. The Holy See does not, however, refuse to dispense from this impediment if it has the necessary guarantees that the pair will not afterwards be forced to live together again as husband and wife. Unlike the former requirements on this point, the present law does not impose the obligation of becoming a religious on the other party as well. Formerly he would have had to go into

religion himself or at the least undertake to observe perfect chastity in the world.

(5) *'Those who are, or have been, bound by religious profession'* cannot be validly admitted.

This impediment may be due either to consideration for the rights of the institute to which the candidate still belongs or to a more or less justifiable fear of inconstancy in the new vocation. In the case of one already bound by profession, the law provides for a possible transfer to another institute, provided that authorisation is obtained from the Holy See (canon 632 and the following). Sometimes a religious has to forgo the advantage of profession for some serious cause (health or some other reason) and then later he finds that he is really strong enough to take up religious life again, either in the same institute or in another. This is not so very rare an occurrence. Hence the Holy See frequently uses its power of dispensing from this impediment. According to legislation made just before the Code, those who had been sent away from seminaries and colleges could not be validly received, while on the other hand a person in temporary vows could be re-admitted without a special indult after they had expired. At the present time the impediment is general; it extends to all who have made profession, whether in the institute they want to re-enter or in another.

(6) *'Those liable to punishment for a grave misdemeanour, of which they have been or may be accused.'*

Exclusion of such people is justified by the possibility that their intentions may not be altogether what they ought to be if they go into religion in these circumstances, and by the danger that the institute accepting them may receive a bad name through it. The impediment applies whether the misdemeanour is ecclesiastical or civil.

(7) *'Bishops, whether they reside in their diocese or are only titular; even those just nominated by the Roman Pontiff' and not yet consecrated, etc.*

Once a bishop bound to residence has taken possession of his see he is intimately united to his church by a sort of spiritual marriage.

Where a titular bishop is concerned or a diocesan before he has taken possession, the fact that the Sovereign Pontiff has

personally intervened and nominated him would make a change of state seem like flouting the Pope's wishes.

(8) *'Clerics who by ordinance of the Holy See are bound on oath to devote themselves to the service of their dioceses or to the service of the missions, for as long as the obligation created by the oath lasts.'*

The clerics in question here are those studying in some of the Roman ecclesiastical colleges (e.g. the *Collegium Germanicum*). They undertake to serve in their own dioceses or missions, at any rate for a given length of time. The impediment does not, therefore, touch the clerics mentioned in c. 981, those ordained 'on the title of the diocese or mission'.

Taking a general view of the impediments invalidating admission to the noviciate, we see that they chiefly touch those already established in another state of life, those who by reason of age or pressure might not have the necessary freedom for entering, and those who either give rise to serious fear of inconstancy or are notoriously unworthy.

B. The second group of impediments laid down by c. 542 is concerned not with invalid, but with illicit admission to the noviciate. It will be seen at once that several of them merely forbid anew what is already forbidden by the natural law.

'The following can be admitted validly but not licitly':

(1) *'Clerks in holy orders if they fail to consult their ordinary, or if the ordinary opposes the step on the ground that their departure would be gravely detrimental to the good of souls, and that this detriment could not be avoided unless they stayed.'*

The principle is that admission to the state of perfection is open to everybody (c. 538) and therefore to clerics, who certainly can find in it new means of serving God better and becoming more closely united to him through charity. Hence the canon does not go so far as to require the ordinary's consent but simply imposes on the cleric the obligation of asking his opinion. However, the ordinary could veto the proposal if the departure of the cleric would render serious harm to souls and the harm could not otherwise be remedied. Serious harm and the impossibility of finding another solution are the two conditions which must be found together if an ordinary is to be justified in objecting when one of his clerics wants to enter a religious order.

It will be admitted that in normal circumstances these conditions will not often be fulfilled. A slight delay will often be enough to meet the needs of the diocese. It is not surprising that the prohibition touches only those in major orders, i.e. subdeacons, deacons and priests, for these—especially priests—are the only ones entrusted with ministerial work. Those in minor orders are quite free to go into religion.

On 25 June, 1941, the Sacred Congregation of Religious and the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities issued a joint decree apparently introducing considerable innovations, since it ordered that before admitting to religion *men who had left a seminary for any reason whatever*, religious superiors should refer the case to the Sacred Congregation of Religious.¹

The bearing of the decree was clearly defined in the authoritative commentary given shortly afterwards by Cardinal la Puma, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Religious. Nothing more is demanded of the clerk wanting to embrace the religious state than was required before. The new decree requires recourse to the Holy See only if it is proposed to receive into religion a clerk who 'at one time or another has abandoned the clerical calling'.²

(2) *'Those burdened with debts which they cannot pay.'*

This prohibition is based on natural law. It would not, however, apply to people who had obtained their creditors' consent and received adequate guarantees that there would not subsequently be any legal proceedings. But it would still be necessary to consider whether the reputation of the institute would not suffer if they were accepted.

(3) *'Those with some special responsibility or other temporal business to attend to, by reason of which the institute might become involved in lawsuits or troubles.'*

The law aims at protecting the institute and not allowing people to enter if they are burdened with material cares incompatible with the kind of life they aspire to.

(4) *'Children bound to help parents (i.e. fathers, mothers,*

¹ A.A.S. 33 (1941), p. 371. The same decree required recourse to be made to the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities before anybody who had in any way been a member of a religious family could be admitted to a seminary.

² R.C.R., 1945, p. 25.

grandfathers and grandmothers) in really straitened circumstances, and parents whose services are needed for the maintenance and education of their children.'

Positive law here takes up on its own account an obligation created by piety under the natural law : it is wrong to do a work of supererogation if it means leaving a parent or child gravely in need of help.

The need in question is above all a material one. It will not always be easy to tell whether it occurs in a given case. Would a son or daughter be obliged to stay at home, for instance, to help needy parents if the social services of the country ensured that the parents could be admitted to a home and there receive the necessary care ? The answer would seem to depend on the previous status of the parents : for some, going into a home would amount to coming down in the world, for others it would not.

Father Vermeersch deals in this connection with what he calls the 'moral need of parents'¹. He has in mind people in easy circumstances who, though they can perfectly well afford servants, nevertheless declare that if their daughter goes into religion it will be the death of them, or will disgust them with religious practice for good and all, etc. These cases fairly often occur and spiritual directors find them an embarrassment. Father Vermeersch thinks that they cannot be solved unless careful consideration is given to various factors, such as the kind of need felt by the parents and its cause, which may either be involuntary or arise from a bad frame of mind ; the spiritual detriment to the son or daughter ; the kind of vocation (contemplative, active, etc.) and the degree to which it is considered a matter of personal urgency ; the effect of entering—will it cause scandal or edification ?—and so on. Sometimes a slight delay in carrying out the project will enable a settlement to be reached.

In the absence of positive law on the subject, the grave need on the part of brothers or sisters is taken to have the same effect as the grave need of parents. This may oblige an elder brother or sister to postpone going into religion or even to give up the idea altogether.

In this connection canonists and moral theologians also go into the question as to whether grave need coming on the parents

¹ Vermeersch—Creusen, *Epitome Iuris Canonici* 17th edn., n. 685.

after the child had gone into religion would create an obligation for the child to give up the religious life. Speaking very roughly, the reply must be in the negative. It will usually be found a sufficient remedy if help is given by the superiors, or if the religious is exclaustated for a time so that he can provide for the maintenance of his parents.

(5) *'Those who in religion would be destined for the priesthood but are debarred from it by irregularity or some other canonical impediment.'*

This impediment applies only to clerical institutes. Its aim is obvious enough: the Holy See does not want people to presume that it will automatically consent to dispense from irregularity or impediment and that the dispensation need not be applied for until the last moment before ordination. For this reason, Father Vermeersch¹ considers that no permission is required for admitting a man to the noviciate if it is expected that he will be quite free from irregularity and impediment by the time he is ready for ordination.

(6) *'Catholics of the Eastern rites may not be received into the noviciate of an institute of the Latin Church without written leave from the Sacred Congregation for the Eastern Church.'*

This prohibition does not apply to those institutes in the Latin Church which have set up provinces for the Eastern rites and receive aspirants for them.²

As we have said above, these two lists of impediments drawn up by the common law with regard to valid and licit admission to the noviciate, have sometimes been supplemented by particular law for particular institutes.

Illegitimate birth is sometimes found among these additional impediments in various congregations. It may be doubted whether a general measure with respect to this point is necessary or expedient. Where the constitutions do not contain a prohibition of this kind, superiors are often heard to say that they are sorry they took such people. On the other hand there are instances—and they occur more and more now that marriages are so often celebrated before the civil registrar alone—where

¹ *Op. cit.* n. 686.

² Reply of the Pontifical Commission, 10 Nov., 1925. A.A.S., 17 (1925), p. 582.

candidates showing all the desirable qualities and with no likelihood that the danger of a more or less hereditary taint would develop, would be excluded if this rule were enforced. It would therefore seem preferable to make it possible for each case to be judged on its own merits, and not to introduce general prohibitions into particular law unless the necessary faculties for dispensation are given with them.

CHAPTER VII

NEGATIVE CRITERIA OF VOCATION

By REGINALD OMEZ, O.P.

I do not propose to deal here with those abnormalities (atavistic, hysterical, epileptic, schizoid, paranoiac, etc.) which belong more to neurosis than to psychology or moral theology. I consider here defects belonging palpably to the moral order and revealing themselves by distinctive signs in the moral and social spheres, whatever their causes or physical substrata may be.

I. DEFECTS OF CHARACTER

God in his wisdom cannot call people to a way of life for which they can never be fitted and in which they could not persevere short of a perpetual miracle. Absence of qualities indispensable for the religious life would nullify any positive criteria of vocation there might seem to be. This is the case with a certain number of states of health and inherited or acquired psychological tendencies ; but in the character, too, there may be deep-seated ineradicable tendencies incompatible with the religious life.

If living the religious life meant no more than carrying out the theological virtues to a high pitch of perfection and keeping the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, there would not be many obstacles. But the religious life is of necessity lived in common, and further, it requires a degree of obedience, especially where women are concerned, far beyond the canonical content of the vow of obedience.

Life in common demands pliability, adaptability, good manners, broadmindedness, ability to put up with other people and a capacity for shutting one's eyes to things or forgetting them—qualities by no means universal in postulants. That is why the common life generally constitutes the most serious obstacle to the carrying out of a vocation, and this not only at the beginning, but all through life.

It will be seen, then, that some defects of character may decide against the genuineness of an apparent vocation to the religious

life. These should be borne in mind as negative criteria of vocation.

1. Bad Temper

The first of these criteria is what is commonly called 'bad temper'.

The people to whom this indefinable epithet is applied may differ greatly in many respects but they are all distinguished by habits which make things unpleasant for those who live with them. They are irritable, touchy, cantankerous, impatient and always inclined to take things amiss. If you make enquiries, you very soon find that they have scarcely ever got on with anybody, either in their own families or in any other group they have lived in. People like this make life very difficult in a community. They can influence others to such an extent as to produce a profound change in the atmosphere of a religious house and create situations unbearably trying to some of their sisters—who are occasionally sacrificed by superiors for the sake of avoiding distressing scenes, with the result that genuine vocations may be shaken. And often, after trying the patience of superiors and sisters for years on end, in spite of everything these nuns eventually leave the congregation, which ought never, of course, to have accepted them in the first place.

Charity towards the congregation and its members as a whole comes before pity for a postulant who has no special right to this dangerous condescension, as she is not yet a member of the family. That superiors should be forbearing in the extreme with regard to professed nuns who have become unpleasant and difficult to put up with by reason of illness or old age or some temporary trouble, is part of their duty: they are the spiritual mothers of these difficult children. But where their business is to weigh up an aspirant's vocation, pity might be culpable weakness and its consequences for the good of the congregation and its individual members sometimes incalculable.

2. Habit of Contradicting

When this aberration is so deeply rooted as to be apparently incurable it may throw grave doubt on the possibility of religious life in common and even of the acceptance of any spiritual instruction.

3. Want of Docility

Some people are of a critical turn of mind, always wanting reform, totally lacking in the pliability needed for accepting a line of conduct from a superior or conforming to a Rule, perpetually feeling the need to act differently from other people and to be outside the common life. The young of to-day seem to be developing this tendency to a considerable extent.

It may be that during the time of testing in the postulancy and noviciate people like this will be awakened by grace to a deep love of God and the religious life, which will help them to see the meaning of religious obedience and free them from their excessive independence of mind and over-confidence in themselves. But if they give no clear token of lasting improvement before profession, it would be most unwise to let them bind themselves by the vow of obedience, as they would be incapable of living in conformity with it.

The last few years have seen an increase in the number of cases of separation or attempted separation from religious congregations, in consequence of such independence of mind on the part of unsubmissive women who had refused to acquire the spirit of the religious family to which they belonged. Sometimes they were only postulants and had not even entered the noviciate when they decided to modify the rules or even the spirit of the congregation in accordance with their own opinions or to withdraw with a few of the sisters if their attempt should fail.

4. Domineering Disposition

There are people who are made for commanding and managing others ; their personality is too pronounced for them to accept second place. They might be excellent at running Catholic Action or founding charitable organisations or secular institutes ; they will never make religious, with the duty of remaining for years on end within the framework of obedience and the necessity of being just like other people.

This need of commanding and taking responsibility may be so highly developed and deeply rooted that efforts to produce pliability may actually entail a nervous breakdown. Such people are certainly not made for religious life in common in a women's

institute, except in congregations where of necessity a great deal of initiative and responsibility is left to the individual at a very early stage.

5. Jealousy

If it is deeply rooted in the temperament, if it is hereditary or has frequently revealed its presence before the postulant entered and during the noviciate, or if it becomes abnormal and morbid in its manifestations, it constitutes a serious obstacle to religious life in common and may produce consequences gravely harmful to the community. Dreadful upsets may be caused by interference from these nuns, who think they are acting in the name of justice or for the common good, while in fact they are simply blinded by jealousy.

II. LACK OF JUDGMENT

Some people have very little intelligence and are unable to form general ideas or reason logically; and no reliance can be placed on their powers of intuition either. They live on their feelings and imagination and are quite incapable of correcting their erroneous judgments.

They may be touching in their humility, submissiveness, unenlightened desire to be helpful and childish devotion to their superiors, but they will go astray the moment they have to take the initiative about anything, form a judgment about a person or event, or give a piece of advice.

They will make good servants or helpers in religious houses or do well as religious in the kitchen or the laundry. There they will render devoted service and prove themselves most deserving, and they will not be able to compromise the community, as they will never have to act in its name with regard to outsiders. This will be found to work particularly where a community is very large.

But as choir sisters or in small communities they are likely to prove trying to their sisters, create misunderstandings and put a false interpretation on the conduct of the other members of the community or do harm by their judgment of it, not to mention the serious disadvantages that may result from their contacts with the outside world. These are the people who do most to

bring nuns into disrepute by their blunders and artlessness and the absurdity of their conduct or the advice they give.

III. LACK OF BALANCE

By this deliberately vague term I understand certain habits of mind resulting from family, national, racial, social or religious traditions and producing incurably erroneous ideas, especially about religion or the religious life. Some distorted ideas, coming either from heredity or from environment, are so deeply engraved in the mind that humanly speaking there is no help of correcting them. For this reason some international congregations have stopped taking postulants from certain races or ancestry or converts from certain religions, experience having shown that it is still premature to introduce such people to religious life lived in common, as they are unable to adapt themselves to it.

Cases in point are the children of gipsies and others without a fixed place of residence, Moslems, members of certain Indian castes, etc. . . . or people coming from certain orphanages.

Others may manage to settle down in congregations specially designed for them, such as the Congregation of Bethany for fallen women, whereas they would find it difficult to fit in with other forms of religious or community life.

The exclusion of widows, old people, illegitimate children, etc., prescribed by the constitutions of some institutes is also based on experience of the same kind.

Care must still be taken, however, not to give way to prejudice or hasty generalisation. This is one of the points on which it would be valuable for superior-generals and novice-mistresses to confer.

I include under the same heading the *instability* of those who can never stay more than a few months or a few years in the same surroundings. There are some people who spend their lives in going as postulants from one congregation to another in the vain hope of eventually finding one they can stay in. The surprising thing is not so much the persistence of illusion in these poor women as the fact that congregations are willing to accept postulants with a series of unfruitful attempts to their credit.

Here again we see pity for an individual coming in practice before charity towards the institute. It is forgotten that injudicious recruiting may entail serious harm for the congregation.

CHAPTER VIII

UNCONSCIOUS ATTRACTION TO THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

By A. PLÉ, O.P.

Now that we have seen what negative criteria of vocation are provided by the psychology of the *conscious*, it will, I think, be useful to make a few observations from a theological standpoint on the kind of attraction to the religious life that belongs to the psychology of the *unconscious*.

By the unconscious is meant the part of our psychic life which we are unable to bring into the field of consciousness even if we so desire and of which we can become aware only by shrewd inferences from its effects. For it seems to be scientifically certain that this unconscious life does exist ; though we need to follow up the achievements of Freud, who was the first to discover it and who has brought it under scientific observation ; and the interpretation of his findings must be purified of extraneous elements on scientific grounds alone, while the system formed from these findings needs to be thought out afresh from the start. In spite of the inevitable confusion resulting from the many works aiming at some such revision, the existence of this unconscious life and the main outlines of it seem to be discernible already and are in fact clearly proved.

We know enough, then, to be in a position to ask whether this new science could shed any light that would help us to detect fitness and unfitness for the religious life and, if so, how.

Just as at the physical level tuberculosis unfits people for the religious life (except in certain special congregations), whatever supernatural qualities there may be in the attraction the life has for them, so also there may be psychological unfitness, whether at the conscious level or at the unconscious. It is a blessing that science can improve our knowledge of this psychological unfitness and fitness ; attempts to judge vocations cannot fail to benefit from it.

As early as the sixth century St Gregory¹ noticed that some

¹ *In Moral.* VI. 37. (no. 57).

temperaments are naturally 'suited' to the contemplative life and others to the active. St Thomas¹ quotes him in this connection and also speaks of the physiological 'aptitude' an individual may have for practising a given virtue by reason of the particular way in which the parts of his bodily organism are 'disposed'. He says :

Virtue is natural to individuals inasmuch as their bodily constitution predisposes them more or less favourably to certain virtues. As some of the sensitive faculties are acts of particular parts of the body, the way these parts are constituted will be a help or hindrance to the action of the rational faculties, which are served by the sensitive ones. In this way one man will have a natural aptitude for knowledge, another for fortitude, another for temperance. These intellectual and moral virtues are in us by nature, as we have the beginnings of aptitude for them. (I-II, 63. *lc.*)

To the constitution of the physical organism, modern science adds the hormones and many other physio-psychological factors, not least of which is the unconscious. However different the part of the unconscious may be from that of the bodily organs in facilitating virtue, what St Thomas says of the one applies also to the other : we all of us have within ourselves aptitude for some virtues and inaptitude for others, whether this aptitude and inaptitude be inborn or acquired, organic or psychic.

This aptitude is not virtue, for virtue exists only in so far as reason is in control ; but it does dispose us more or less favourably to submit to the control of reason.

Physio-psychological factors disposing a person towards the practice of a given virtue may be strong enough to make him show outwardly the behaviour characteristic of the virtue when he is not really making an act of virtue at all. It may happen, for instance, that a man will repeatedly bear grave injustice and wrongs without protesting. One is inclined to admire his patience and charity, but his behaviour may be explicable solely on grounds of an atomic lymphatic temperament or by unconscious desire for failure and suffering.²

¹ *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 182, 4, ad. 3.

² Cf. Dr. Charles Odier, *Les deux sources consciente et inconsciente de la vie morale* (Ed. de la Baconnière, Neufchatel, 1947). A good summary of this will be found in V. Vergriette, O.P., *La pseudo morale inconsciente*, in the *Supplement de La Vie Spirituelle*, no. 7, 15 Nov. 1948.

To bring out the importance of this process more clearly, we may take an example from one of the early novels of François Mauriac, *La Robe prétexte*. A young man from the provinces comes to Paris and is introduced to an actress, who quite obviously offers herself to him. He leaves her precipitately but not on grounds of morality or faith or even out of a sense of shame ; it is just that something holds him back. He tries to analyse it :

In this setting which delighted and at the same time repelled me, the mystery of vocation broke upon my heart and mind, but not at all with the narrow sense of religious vocation usually given to the word. I felt that a terrible providence was spoiling all joys for me before I had tasted them. A young and willing woman was smiling at me with a smile that was a promise, but in vain. All I wanted to do was to run away . . .

An invisible presence forbade any more passionate embrace. Camille (a young cousin who had shared his life as a child) was there in the uniform of her boarding-school and my mother, whom I scarcely remembered (she had died when he was a few years old) was bending her face towards me as she had done in my childhood before I went to sleep. Conscience and lust were gnawing me together.

Here is a case of a person avoiding sin, as far as one can tell, but not performing an act of virtue. The obstacle stopping the young man seems to him as inevitable and mysterious as what he erroneously takes for providence ; but it is only an inhibition, which may one day be overcome by some psychological event or eliminated by psychiatric treatment.

It often happens in such cases that even the person concerned is mistaken about the real motive for his behaviour ; in all good faith he believes that he is prompted by virtue. And indeed the thrusts sent up by the unconscious have a habit of never appearing on the scene of the conscious unless they can pose as motives of the highest kind. This is an effect of what psychoanalysts call 'rationalisation'. The fox in the fable, finding the ripe grapes out of reach, sincerely believes that they are too sour and that that is the reason why he goes away and leaves them.

Thus, when an attempt has to be made to estimate the

genuineness of a vocation, it may be of use to find out the ultimate motives behind what outwardly appears to be perfectly satisfactory behaviour. Absence of sin or conflict is not a proof of virtue. The brake applied to prevent sin is not necessarily the regulating influence of the reason ; it may belong to the psychological order. Thus, confessor and penitent may both be under an illusion, and the moment this psychological brake is taken off the penitent may for want of virtue be left defenceless against a passion whose existence he never suspected.

A girl may think herself called to the practice of perfect chastity, for instance, solely because the things of the flesh are repugnant to her. Putting the best possible construction on it, the reaction in question is one of shame (which is a passion) and not of the virtue of chastity.

The virtuous attitude to the things of the flesh consists of keeping the passions in order with a view to obtaining a good freely chosen and loved by the superior faculties. It is not a reaction of the passions and instincts. The reaction producing a blush at an improper act is caused by a passion and in the vernacular may be called shame (St Thomas's *verecundia*). It is a help in the practice of charity but is not itself a virtue.¹ So true is this that for St Thomas lack of '*verecundia*' is a sign either of depths of vice or of great virtue.²

It is thus essential to know the real reasons why the girl wants to consecrate her virginity to the Lord. It is not always easy, however, to distinguish the respective shares of virtue, shame and an unconscious psychological factor in such a desire. Certainly, if the attraction to the religious life were *in fact no more than* the manifestation of an unconscious inhibition, it would not be genuine. The conclusion might be that there was no vocation.

But in reality things are not so simple. To return to the question of chastity, all three motive-forces—virtue, shame and

¹ II-II, 144, 1.

² '... the things which ought to produce a blush are no longer realised to be disgraceful. This is the way in which men who wallow in sin are lacking in shame ; they are not displeased by their sins but rather glory in them. In others there may be want of shame because they think they could never be tempted to commit disgraceful acts themselves, or at any rate could easily avoid committing them if they were. This is the way in which the old and the virtuous lack *verecundia*, but their dispositions are such that if there were anything filthy in them, they would be ashamed of it.' (II-II, 144c, in fin.).

psychological factors—are usually operative together. It is only normal and healthy that they should be. We come back here to what St Thomas says about aptitude and inaptitude for virtue. The fact that unconscious psychological factors are involved, even if they are slightly neurotic, is certainly not disquieting enough to warrant refusal of a candidate for the religious life. Some inhibitions may in fact at first facilitate growth of virtue. Virtue will substitute conscious, rational, supernatural control for the unconscious brake used by the psyche against itself and so will be sure to have a healing effect. *Gratia sanans* ; grace heals.

The truth of this can be established from experience (*a posteriori*) and from principle (*a priori*).

A posteriori. We know from hagiography and our own personal experience of people whose disturbing psychology has very soon been put right by the action of the Holy Ghost in consequence of a real life of prayer and deep love of God.

A priori. The fact can cause no surprise to a disciple of St Thomas ; it could have been deduced from his idea of the soul as form of the body. For St Thomas, soul and body form one substantial whole. The soul is the principle of all our activity, from the most corporal to the most spiritual, from digestion to prayer. Diseases of the physical organism are the diseases of a man, not of an animal. A doctor is not a veterinary surgeon.

In consequence of this unity of soul and body the faculty, for example, which in animals is called 'estimative', in man is given the name of 'cogitative'. This change in terminology is designed to show that while remaining a sensitive faculty, the cogitative power calls for a share in reason. It is not reason itself it is an instinctive power of distinguishing between things which governs the behaviour of animals ; but in man it is found raised to a height at which it acts by a process of quasi-rational inference.¹ In the same way the passions, which man has in common with the animals, need to share in the superior light of reason, though they do not thereby cease to be passions or lose any of the play of the physio-psychological forces constitutive of passion. This sharing by the passions in the spiritual nature of the soul is an effect of virtue.

It is worth pointing out in this connection that the passions

¹ I. 78, 4.

need to participate not only in reason but in what St Augustine calls the '*mens*',¹ i.e. the aggregate of the spiritual faculties of the soul. The participation of the passions in the '*mens*' is not limited to their submission to the control of reason. The reason certainly plays its part, which is to set things in order ; but here it belongs to the sphere of prudence : it sets means in order with respect to an end. It has to act on the passions by setting them in order with respect to a spiritual object chosen by a free act and loved by the spiritual power of loving, which St Thomas calls the will. In short, the passions need to share in everything that makes an act specifically human, and that is why theology considers them as human acts, capable of being moral or immoral. As human acts, passions are good in so far as they allow themselves to be set in order with respect to the end spiritually loved. They are bad when reason puts itself at the disposal of the passions and their sensible ends, or again if reason does not intervene when it should. In a word, in man the passions cannot help being human acts ; they are under a natural necessity of serving a superior end, the human end properly so-called.

What is more, in the soul inhabited by grace, a superior principle of life inspires all the individual's natural powers, both spiritual and sensible. It is charity that acts as this superior principle of life.² Thus in the last resort the passions need to share in spiritual love. Virtue is the 'order love imposes'.³

Hence, for a thomist, virtue is conceived as the subsuming by the spiritual soul of all the forces below it. Thus, as regards bringing the powers of the individual into effect, it is this subsuming of lower forces by a spiritual love, and this alone, that gives the individual his unity. Through this participation in spirit and this giving of superior motives to the lower parts of the soul by the higher part, everything falls harmoniously into its proper place.

To understand how this works, we should distinguish between

¹ Cf. Gardeil, *La structure de l'âme et l'expérience mystique*, p. XXVIII and passim.

² II-II, 23, 7 and 8.

³ *Virtus est ordo amoris* ; St Augustine, *De Moribus Eccles.*, c. 15 ; '*ordinatio, quae virtus vocatur*' ; St Augustine, LXXXIII Quaest., q. 30 ; cf. St Thomas, I-II, 55, 1 ad 1. For the central role of love in the moral life and the life of the passions, cf. *L'oe et l'Amour*, a special number of *Supplément de la Vie Spirituelle*, May, 1951.

the various analogical levels of the psychological life. Culpability will provide an example of these analogical levels : the moral judgment by which I declare myself guilty is one thing, feeling guilty is another, being the victim of behaviour dictated by an unconscious sense of guilt is yet another. These are three entirely distinct realities and yet, analogically, they have something in common. It is not without reason that the word 'guilt' is used of all three. Guilt at the moral level is not the same as the psychological feeling of guilt ; they are not of the same nature, and the one may exist without the other. Neither of them is identical with the unconscious feeling of guilt, which, incidentally, is not necessarily neurotic. Thus, there seem to be grounds for thinking that normally moral guilt is felt psychologically and that it rests on (and shows the proper meaning of) that unconscious sense of guilt which apparently constitutes the normal substructure of human psychology.¹

Thus subsuming of conscious and unconscious psychological activity by a moral judgment is what gives unity to the human individual. It takes in the individual at every analogical level and at the same time ensures the proper functioning of each level and its harmonious integration in the whole. The animal element in man must allow itself to be 'humanised' in this way, though it will not therefore cease to be animal. If it is not humanised it becomes corrupt, for its humanisation is required by the laws of its nature. In so far as it is possible to distinguish levels of life in man it seems that progress in virtue like growth in a child, can in the end be brought back to the principle that every level cries out to be subsumed by the one above it.²

Psychoanalysis seems to be in agreement with thomism on this point. At any rate we can read in Freud that :

Once we have admitted the conception of a fusion of the two classes of instinct (Eros and Thanatos) with each other, the possibility of a more or less complete 'defusion' of them forces itself upon us. The sadistic component of the sexual

¹ Thomas Gilby, O.P., Communication to the International Congress of Mental Health, London, 1948, published in the Proceedings published by H. K. Lewis, New York, vol. III and translated as *Genèse de la culpabilité*, in the *Supplément de la Vie Spirituelle*, no. 12, 15 Feb., 1950.

² Cf. A. Plé, O.P. *Saint Thomas et la psychologie des profondeurs* in the *Supplément de la Vie Spirituelle*, November, 1951.

instinct would be a classical example of instinctual fusion serving a useful purpose; and the perversion in which sadism has made itself independent would be typical of defusion, though not of absolutely complete defusion.¹

Thus, *mutatis mutandis* 'fusion' would be at the unconscious level what animation by reason and charity is, naturally or supernaturally, at the conscious level. The fusion of the sadistic element with the sexual instinct would be an example of the way in which the passions are subsumed by the reason or the animal's estimative power extended to become the cogitative power in man. 'Defusion' would correspond to failure to subsume the passions, i.e. would correspond to vice.

Now this analogy does not belong solely to the conceptual order; it is first and foremost existential. These analogical levels occur in one and the same human individual. They have a real connection one with another: the influence of the highest level of the soul acting under supernatural guidance ought to be felt in the psychological level nearest to the biological, penetrating the levels in between and (to use Freud's term) fusing even the most unconscious instinctive impulses with itself.

The expectation that grace and virtue will have a good influence on the unconscious life and that in some cases, where there is neurosis, this influence will have a genuinely therapeutic effect, is thus justified. Of course, it is not easy to foresee to what extent grace will have this curative effect. That depends on the severity of the neurosis. It also depends on the quality and intensity of the grace given and the depth to which it sends down its roots. It is for the priest or the novice-master to weigh up these supernatural factors. It is the psychologist's business to form a judgment about the neurosis. The information he gives will enable the priest, judging from a supernatural standpoint, to make a final decision with better knowledge of the ground into which the seed of vocation falls. He will be in a position, if he accepts the candidate, to train him better. If he refuses him, he will simply be eliminating certain failure, which would be harmful both to the candidate and to the religious community concerned.

It should be clearly realised that commonsense is not adequate

¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (authorised translation by Joan Riviere), International Psycho-Analytical Library, no. 12, London 1927, pp. 57-8.

for estimating aptitude or inaptitude for the religious life, especially when there are unconscious factors at work.¹ Notwithstanding his good faith the candidate cannot acknowledge these unconscious motives, because he is not aware of them himself, and what the novice-master or novice-mistress finds out by observation during the postulancy and noviciate is not decisive. Only a professional has eyes and ears to detect a latent neurosis artfully hiding behind normal behaviour. Unconscious fear of contact with the world, for example, may be concealed by the perfectly orthodox motives of contempt for the world and flight to the desert. For a long time the person's projects and behaviour may seem to be inspired by these traditional motives, whereas events may ultimately prove that in fact they were only effects of neurosis.

The same could be said of false attraction to the mystical life, coming from latent hysteria, false apostolic zeal paranoiac in origin, and so forth.

If the psychologist can give us warning at the outset, it would surely be a sin not to ask for his services. The sacred character of grace, especially the grace of vocation, as well as respect for the human person make it a serious obligation for us to use every possible means to avoid mistakes about vocation.

It is clear, however, that mistakes are often made about vocations. Postulants and novices leave, so do those in temporary vows and even some who have made their final vows. Among those who remain in the congregation, some are subject to endemic attacks inducing states of mind and outward behaviour hardly compatible with the religious life; others are in a debilitated condition and have resigned themselves to mediocrity.

All these failures are not necessarily due to infidelity on the part of the persons concerned. There certainly seem to be cases where the vocation was not correctly diagnosed; either there was no vocation at all or else it was to another form of religious life. In all such cases both the individual and the community have a great deal to suffer from these mistakes. Considering that

¹ This does not detract in the least from the value of the observations made by saints like St Teresa of Avila (cf. *Entretiens de sainte Thérèse sur la vie religieuse*, c. 2. Editions du Seuil) and St Jeanne de Chantal (cf. *Du choix et de la formation des sujets* in *Oeuvres de sainte Chantal*, t. III. pp. 491-504) about weighing up vocations. What they say is the fruit of their experience and wisdom.

grace and vocation are sacred things an intolerable waste of God's gifts is involved, and this makes it absolutely essential to use every possible means to reduce the number of such errors. It would, of course, be hopeless to expect to get rid of them entirely : we should need to foresee the interplay of divine grace and human freedom, and only a Curé d'Ars could do that.

If the human mind cannot probe this mysterious interplay even after the event (for when someone leaves a religious institute it is often impossible to tell whether it was through infidelity to a real vocation or simply due to the late discovery that there was no vocation at all), still less can it see it beforehand.

But apart from these cases, which could not have been avoided, there are many others which could and should have been. The postulancy and noviciate—the test of time—are not always sufficient. Even when they are and the person is sent back to the world, the trial is apt to prove big with consequences for both parties, the novice or postulant on the one hand and the community on the other.

Since neurotic desires for the religious life play an important part in these unfortunate cases, it may well be asked whether psychologists could not give valuable help in the matter by pointing, while there is still time, to the presence of those unconscious motives which often form the starting-point of false vocations or those latent neuroses which in the ordinary course of things would not emerge into the light of day until it was too late.

General agreement may be expected on the following points :

1. Whatever else it may do, no psychological process can enable us to tell whether a person has a vocation or not, in so far as the supernatural side of it is concerned. It is not for the psychologist to say, 'This person has, or has not, a vocation'. The point will not bear discussion. Moreover, in his encyclical *Divini illius Magistri*, on education, Pius XI gives a warning to this effect in the clearest terms. He condemns those who 'advance the claim—none the less wrong, blasphemous and dangerous for being devoid of any foundation—to be able to test by ordinary, purely secular examination or experiment the supernatural factors that may enter into a child's education, such as a divine vocation to the priesthood or the religious life, and in general the mysterious effects caused in the human soul by grace, which, though it

elevates the powers of nature, yet infinitely transcends them and can in no way be subject to physical laws, since "the spirit breathes where it will" (John 3, 8).¹

2. Even at the natural level, where the psychologists work, there are important limits to their investigations. If the psychologist is honest and a scientific worker, he will not claim to be able to reach the centre of the personality, the depths of the ego, the springs of personal freedom. What he can do is to give a certain number of details about the materials out of which the personal synthesis has been made, but he cannot get at the synthesis itself. He can find out the principal components of a person's character, the psychological traces left in him by heredity and his own past. That is no small achievement, but it is not knowledge of the centre of the personality.

We are suffering at the moment from an infatuation with psychology, psychoanalysis, psychological tests, etc., which are held up as universal panaceas. It is only a fashion, but one that is stupid, ill-formed, harmful and often morbid. Serious workers in the psychological field are the first to deplore it, as it cannot but compromise their efforts.

We must not follow this fashion ; and yet we must not let ourselves be tricked by it by immediately rejecting everything to do with psychology. If we must not ask it for what it cannot give us, we must not refuse to use those of its discoveries which are valid and usable, scientifically established and brought into general use.

Within these limits, which genuine specialists are the first to recognise, psychologists can be useful in helping us to acquire a better knowledge of a given person's psychology. The grace of vocation is not ashamed of the human nature in which it takes root ; the nature of the ground has its part to play in the development of the seed, as we know from the parable of the sower in the gospel. Not to take it into account would mean being deficient in *supernatural* prudence. Once again, it is not the psychologist's business to judge vocations. That belongs to the priest or the novice-master or novice-mistress, and they have to judge from the supernatural standpoint. Save in the very exceptional case of the charisma of prophecy, however, they cannot do so until they

¹ *A.A.S.* 22 (1930), p. 70 ; cf. *ib.* 21 (1929), p. 746 ; Eng. tr. *The Christian Education of Youth* (C.T.S.) no. 74, p. 32.

have conducted a careful enquiry into all the data of the problem. This enquiry is necessary in order to discover possible canonical impediments; it ought also to go into the question of the psychological suitability or unsuitability of postulants for the particular institute, the psychological reasons why they are attracted to this form of life, etc. . . . Not that every kind of unsuitability, even if it is neurotic, must necessarily entail refusing the postulant concerned. Neuroses are not all alike. It may legitimately be hoped that some will improve or even disappear under the influence of grace and sound mental treatment. Others may be considered compatible with the religious life, which may even provide them with the framework best adapted to their needs, as is the case with the psychoasthenic. But in that case the good of the community must not be neglected. In every community there is a certain point beyond which no more psychoasthenics or people with other slight mental illnesses can be accepted, on pain of making the common life impossible and harmful to all concerned.

In any case, a precise and careful investigation into the postulant's psychological health will diminish the risk of error in deciding about her vocation in accordance with supernatural principles, and enable superiors to see to her training, if she is accepted, with greater insight and efficacy.

3. Granted that it would be desirable to have psychological examinations seriously and scientifically carried out by properly qualified specialists, is it at present possible?

It would seem not. The problem is an exceptionally difficult one even when confined to the estimation of psychical fitness at the natural level, and in the name of scientific honesty a great deal of preparatory work would be required before the methods used in psychology could be applied to it.¹

This work ought to be done by a body of psychiatrists, psychologists and theologians combined. We would like to see such a body set up.

4. Meanwhile, until such a body has been set up and the results

¹ With regard to the use of psychological method in examining vocations, mention may be made of *Testing the Spirit*, by F. D. Duffrey, C.S.C. (Herder Book Co., St. Louis, U.S.A., 1948) and an article entitled *Emotional Maturity*, by the Revd. Gerald Kelly, S.J., in the *American Review for Religious*, 15 Jan., 1948.

of its investigations published, it would be impossible to warn non-specialists too strongly against using these methods. If they did use them they would be wanting in the honesty and seriousness of purpose needed for scientific work, they would be only too likely to make mistakes and do grievous harm both to individuals and to their congregations, and they would jeopardise the useful future which judicious application of these methods may be expected to have.

CHAPTER IX

THE CONTRIBUTION OF EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY¹

By DR CLAUDIO BUSNELLI

It is well known that along with the other documents, whether civil or religious, required of an aspirant before he enters, it has now become the practice in all religious institutes to ask for a certificate attesting the state of the physical health as well. It would be interesting to try to establish the relationship between the development of the medical sciences and the initial date at which it became obligatory to present a certificate of this kind.

It certainly cannot be said that at the present moment psychology has acquired the right to occupy the same rank among the sciences as medicine. But the fact remains that in many posts requiring specific qualities in their occupants, no-one is entertained as a candidate unless he presents not only an accurately compiled medical certificate, but a psychological sketch showing his general capacities and his specific aptitudes in the given field and indicating that he does not possess certain defects of intellect and character.

Then there is that really amazing phenomenon, the introduction in some countries of an obligatory psychological examination, not just for certain categories of recruits to the army but for the entire batch, to permit an estimate to be made of their abilities so that they can be assigned to the various military divisions, in which, moreover, record is kept of their progress.

We should lose the benefit of this if we did not use it as a term of comparison.

Efforts at psychological research were made along these lines in the field we were interested in. Father Plé's brief statement above on the use of psychological method should be read in this light. It contains points agreed upon by those who took part in the talks on vocation, as marking the limits of present researches.

¹ The substance of a communication read to Congress on the States of Perfection, held at Rome in November-December, 1950. The paper was read on the 5th day, December 1.

It would seem necessary to draw the attention of those who take a responsible interest in the progress of religious communities to the use of psychological method in estimating the worth of candidates for the life of perfection. I say 'in estimating the worth' and not 'in selecting' candidates, because I am firmly convinced that vocation is a supernatural thing, and I have in mind the contribution to the work of vocational guidance that could be made by improved knowledge of the candidate.

One experiment already conducted along these lines and made possible by the kindness and interest shown by the superiors of a secular institute and the free co-operation of the candidates deserves to be mentioned. Following the plan of the dossier prepared for the purpose and giving particulars of the candidate's psychological, medical and academic history, a doctor, and educationist and a psychologist met together under the aegis of an important psychological institute, and with a view not to selecting aspirants but estimating their worth and giving them guidance, examined all the men, clerical and lay, and all the women aspiring to the life of perfection in a certain secular institute. From the report on the candidates it is evident that particular attention was given to the psychological examination. Care was taken (after a preliminary study of the predominantly psychic qualities), to conduct this examination in such a way as to identify the most salient traits of character and so enable a judgment to be made, synthesising the results of the various tests and the results of a conversation to which considerable importance was attached. In some respects the experiment yielded really surprising results, of a positive kind, in the case of the first fifteen people examined. This enabled us to put valuable information at the disposal of those responsible for the training of the aspirants, especially when each case was discussed in detail by the experts who had collected the material.

Technical difficulties make it impossible at present to give a more detailed account of the methods followed in collecting the data mentioned on the psychological certificate. It would be more suitable to keep that for a meeting with specialists.

We may end this brief communication by adopting these reflections as our own. We found them in an unpublished work on the question :

These conditions are essential if the person examined is to be known at least approximately. It must, however, be always borne in mind, especially in order to foresee the possible development of negative elements in the personality, that our statistical experiments and scientific abilities will always be faced with a factor defying all attempts at measurement and foresight, i.e. free acceptance (or refusal) of the *mensura donationis Christi*.

This factor, operating on a human temperament and on the gifts developed or submerged by education and environment, will be capable of producing unsuspected transformations if it is grasped and developed, while it will make many human gifts useless for apostolic ends if it is neglected or dissipated.

The ultimate synthesis, the really complete synthesis of the personality will therefore be made under the imponderable influence of this factor, i.e. in the secret of the mystery overshadowing man's reply to the call of God.

Dr. Busnelli appended a model dossier of the Medical, psychological and academic history of a candidate for a religious order. It is divided into five forms : Notes on the family, Personal History, Clinical Medical Examination, Psychological Examination, and Pedagogical Notes. The forms are to be filled in by specially qualified men or women, after examination of the candidate, and are to be kept in the archives as documents which will assist in the training and development of the individual. The dossier itself, however, does not belong to a book of this nature concerned with vocation to religion.

RELIGIOUS SISTERS

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